ISSUE 195 | OCTOBER 2011

DUNGEON

A Dungeons & Dragons® Roleplaying Game Supplement

That Which Never Sleeps

A D&D® adventure for characters of levels 3-5

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Introduction

"That Which Never Sleeps" takes place in the city of Neverwinter, where a series of seemingly random murders leads the adventurers to discover the nefarious plot of a plaguechanged aboleth. The heroes must overcome mind-controlled thralls, vicious monsters, nightmarish creatures from beyond reality, and the insidious, whispering influence of a maddened aberration to defeat their foe and save Neverwinter from another disaster.

This Dungeons & Dragons® adventure is designed for five characters of levels 3–5. It can be played as a stand-alone adventure or as a follow-up

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to the D&D Encounters® adventure *Lost Crown of Neverwinter*™. For more information on Neverwinter and the Abolethic Sovereignty, see the *Neverwinter*™ *Campaign Setting*.

Adventure Background

The southeastern quarter of Neverwinter is a wasteland of tumbled structures overrun with plaguechanged horrors and dominated by the yawning chasm that gives the district its name. The Chasm, torn open during the cataclysmic eruption of Mount Hotenow, not only serves as a reminder of the devastation wrought upon the city but sends forth a tide of monsters that roam the abandoned quarter and hurl themselves at the Wall, a staunchly defended bulwark that safeguards the rest of the city.

Although most within the city, including its ruler Lord Neverember, believe the creatures to be a natural manifestation of the Spellplague, the truth is far darker. When the ground heaved and broke apart twenty-six years ago, it opened a passage to the Underdark, where a cabal of aboleths was experimenting with a trapped pocket of Spellplague. The aberrations had been studying the node in hopes of turning its power to their advantage, and they had no intention of relinquishing it to the surface-dwelling vermin. So they began releasing the twisted results of their failed experiments into the Chasm to deter any from investigating further. Kept safe from prying eyes by a living shield of plague-twisted horrors, the aboleths continue their attempts to master the Spellplague, produce ever more lethal fighting beasts, and corrupt the minds of those living in ignorance above them.

The Spellplague is dangerous and unpredictable, and the aberrant physiology of the aboleths cannot save them from its mutating caress indefinitely. The remains of those overcome by the energy are cast out into the Chasm to die with the rest of the fodder. Not every outcast is rendered helpless, though. Several weeks ago, an aboleth that had been exposed to the unfettered power of the Spellplague was scarred by uncontrolled mutation, but its mind survived, albeit in a state of insanity unrivaled among its kin.

When this creature was unceremoniously dumped into the Chasm, it did not die a brutal death but slunk away to find sanctuary beneath the labyrinthine sewers of Neverwinter. There, unfettered by even the tiniest shred of sanity, it began work in secret on a terrible ritual. It hoped to warp the flesh and shatter the minds of every living thing in the city in a single instant by releasing the Spellplague pocket beneath the city in a tremendous explosion. The fact that this would certainly spell a horrible death for itself, the rest of the aboleth cabal, and most of Neverwinter was immaterial to it. In essence, it wants to do this because it can.

The mad aboleth sought to acquire slaves to work its evil on the surface and protect its sanctum until it could complete its ritual. It bent its considerable psionic prowess to manipulating those who would prove useful, slowly worming psychic tendrils deep into their minds. The final stage of its plan requires a number of thralls on the surface—thralls that have demonstrated their worth by perpetrating a string of gruesome murders across the city.

Adventure Synopsis

As the adventure opens, the adventurers witness a murder in the crowded market of the Protector's Enclave. The guards respond quickly to the disturbance in the heart of reclaimed Neverwinter, bringing Telliann, an aide to Lord Neverember, with them. Telliann explains that a number of unexplained murders have occurred over the past week and that the officials are at a loss as to what is going on. She begs the adventurers to investigate and put an end to the killing before more lives are lost.

Initially the investigation is mundane enough, though the murders appear to have no rhyme or reason. Midway through a routine investigation, however, the adventurers are attacked without provocation by the local citizenry. The slow, stumbling reactions and glassy-eyed stares, if not the murderous intent and lethal armaments, are reminiscent of a sleepwalker. Further examination reveals that the impromptu lynch mob was bewitched, which casts the recent murders in a new light, though it sheds none on who is behind the enchantments. Unfortunately for the heroes, it also exposes them to the insidious influence of the deranged aboleth, whose subtle whispers of madness and probing tendrils of psychic power haunt them for the remainder of the adventure.

When the adventurers return to Telliann with their findings, she is impressed with what they have gathered in such a short amount of time, but her congratulatory speech is interrupted by a psychic shriek that heralds the arrival of assailants backed up by mind-controlled locals. After the heroes beat off the assault, they can descend into the sewers to track the plaguechanged back to their lair, where they come face to face with mind-blanked thralls, plaguechanged monsters, and aberrant horrors.

This journey brings the adventurers to the mad aboleth's redoubt, a damaged realm where reality is splintered and the Spellplague flows freely. Here they confront the insane puppet master, only to find the true extent to which they have been tainted by its incessant whisperings. The aboleth's defeat frees the city—and the heroes—from the clutches of its dire influence.

Adventure Hooks

Here are two ways the adventurers might become involved in the story.

Exploring the Markets: The markets of the Protector's Enclave are the fairest and safest that Neverwinter has to offer. Whether it's to obtain a new length of rope, food for the road, or a sharply honed blade, everyone ends up in the market eventually. The adventurers could be minding their own business while shopping when the adventure kicks off.

By Invitation: A Mintarn guard delivers a short letter to the heroes written by an aide to Lord Neverember named Telliann. She asks the adventurers to meet her in the Protector's Enclave market to discuss some business the city might have for the party. The note lacks any clues as to what she is talking about, but the guard and the official seal are certainly compelling.

Quests

As the adventurers investigate the string of suspicious murders, they have the opportunity to complete the following quests.

MAJOR QUEST: CATCH THE KILLER

5th-Level Major Quest (1,000 XP)

The adventurers must uncover the truth behind the murders and defeat the plaguechanged aboleth before its madness obliterates the city.

MAJOR QUEST: HARM NOT THE INNOCENT

4th-Level Major Quest (875 XP)

The dominated townsfolk whom the aboleth uses as pawns cannot be held responsible for their actions and are as much victims of its terrible power as the characters are. If the adventurers take pains to spare the lives of as many of the unfortunate thralls (especially the human goons in Events 3 and 5) as they can, they merit the reward for this quest.

MINOR QUEST: AID THE FAMILIES

4th-Level Minor Quest (175 XP)

Losing a loved one is hard enough, but not knowing why a loved one died can leave a family in despair forever. When the heroes bring closure, and the bittersweet solace it provides, to the family of one of the victims, they earn this quest reward.

ADAPTING THE ADVENTURE

Although this adventure is designed for adventurers of levels 3–5, you can adapt it for use with higher- or lower-level parties without much trouble. For lower-level parties, the easiest approach is to remove a monster or two (preferably duplicates first) and to lower the DC of the skill checks by one (for 2nd-level adventurers) or two (for 1st-level adventurers) to bring the encounters to a more manageable level. The aboleth plaguewhisper requires a little more work, but a quick and dirty reduction of its hit points to 100 and tacking on a –2 penalty to all its rolls (including damage) should bring it more into the realm of what the adventures can handle after you remove a plaguechanged or two.

Increasing the challenge for higher-level parties is just the reverse and involves nothing more than adding another monster or two into the mix. You can increase the skill challenges' DCs by one for every level the adventurers are higher than the recommended levels, but you won't need to adjust the aboleth (just drop in a nothic or two to keep it company).

Up or down, you don't want to forget to adjust the XP and treasure the party earns to match the new level. Of course, if you have *Monster Vault* and the *Rules Compendium* handy, you could always take a more involved approach, swapping out awkwardly leveled monsters and fine-tuning the adventure to your specifications.

Events

The twelve events that make up this adventure are a mixture of combat encounters, skill challenges, and roleplaying opportunities. Most of the combat occurs in the latter half of the adventure, after the characters discover the route that leads to their nemesis.

Event 1: Murder in the Market

Roleplaying Encounter

The mad aboleth is about to perpetrate the latest of the ritual murders required to fulfill its grand plan.

When the heroes enter the market, read:

The shouts of merchants hawking their wares, the clatter of shuffling merchandise, and the chatter of busy patrons fills the bustling marketplace. Everything from freshly baked meat pies to furniture to short swords is being sold from the backs of carts and from temporary stalls.

If the adventurers are looking for Telliann, she has not arrived yet, so they have time on their hands if they want to take advantage of it. After they take care of anything they want, you can continue with the following.

When the heroes have finished, read:

A sudden scream pierces the normal murmur of the market, followed quickly by shouting and other screams as the crowd surges back from a particular stall. Through gaps in the press, you can make out a blood-drenched figure standing in the center of the rapidly growing empty space just before he collapses to the ground.

When the adventurers move closer, they find two bodies: the man they saw fall and a Mintarn guard who was stationed in the market. The heroes can

make the following skill checks to piece together more information, or you can impart this information to the players through roleplayed interactions with guards and witnesses.

Diplomacy or Streetwise (DC 10): Witnesses swear that the man was walking past when he slid a knife from his sleeve and stabbed the guard in the back. The guard let out a scream and dropped to his knees, but drew his sword and landed a few solid return blows on his assailant as they fought. The guard fell within seconds, and the man with the knife staggered a few feet before his wounds overcame him.

Heal (DC 14): Both men are dead, having expired after a brief but brutal struggle.

Perception or Insight (DC 14): No signs indicate a buildup to confrontation or aggressive moves before the violent attack, which claimed both parties.

When the adventurers have had a chance to make a few checks, a squad of Mintarn guards arrives and secures the scene. A slender human woman with dark hair and attire befitting a city official accompanies the guards and introduces herself as Telliann, one of Lord Neverember's aides, before pulling the adventurers off to one side. She explains that she'll need their utmost discretion with what she is about to share with them. She reveals that this murder is the sixth seemingly random act of lethal violence committed in the past week. In one other instance, the apparent murderer was found dead alongside the victim. Fears are running rampant that the murders are somehow connected to the False Heir (see below) and are part of the ongoing resistance to Lord Neverember's reign, since two of the victims were Mintarn soldiers in his service and another a wealthy merchant who supported Neverember.

If the adventurers were not involved in the events of *Lost Crown of Neverwinter* and ask about the False Heir, Telliann briefly explains that an impostor to the throne bearing a forged Crown of Neverwinter unleashed all manner of plaguechanged horrors upon the population in an attempt to overthrow Lord Neverember. Alternatively, if the adventurers helped save the city, she references some of their heroic exploits during the conversation in an attempt to win their favor and their assistance.

After she has shared what she knows, Telliann asks the adventurers to conduct and finish their own investigation before more people die. She has been authorized to offer the party 1,500 gold pieces and their pick of an uncommon level 8 magic item from the armory if they can put a stop to this string of murders. If they agree, she asks that they come to her with any relevant information they uncover.

MURDER MOST MYSTERIOUS

When the adventurers start looking into the murders, allow them to tackle each one as they wish, but the locations of the older ones are not as intact as the more recent ones. The initial investigation provides you with a prime opportunity to help the adventure feel more like a scenario that the adventurers can tackle in any order they please before they embark on the path that leads to the culprit.

Five Days Ago (Murder 1): Hurvast Marx, a laborer, was the first victim. A shopkeeper on his way to prepare for the day's business discovered Marx's body five days ago in the Protector's Enclave shortly before dawn. Marx had several stab wounds, and the guards assumed he was the victim of a mugging gone wrong since they could not find his purse.

Four Days Ago (Murder 2): Riac "the Knife," a petty thug and blade for hire, was found face down in a gutter in Blacklake four days ago. He had a cracked skull and a perforated back, and the stink of cheap rotgut lingered in the area. Less than a block away, a dead homeless drifter clutched Riac's signature dagger in his stomach. At the time, the guards thought the deaths were another instance of the gang violence endemic to the district, so they put little effort into the investigation.

Three Days Ago (Murder 3): Credar Longstaff's body was found in a gutted townhouse in the River District shortly after the rest of the Mintarn soldiers in his patrol noticed his absence. His body bore the marks of several weapons, and the guards attributed his death to roving orc pillagers.

Two Days Ago (Murder 4): Danas Winterpole was a successful halfling merchant and an outspoken supporter of Lord Neverember's reign. Her staff found her bludgeoned and stabbed in the middle of her locked shop when they opened the building two days ago. The guards quickly cleared her employees of suspicion because the employees were all on good terms with Danas, but that left the guards with no suspects and no leads. At that point, the authorities began to fear that these deaths indicated something far more sinister than a few random murders: They theorized that the deaths might be the work of violent rebel elements.

Yesterday (Murder 5): Sabel Estwick, a farmer who lived within the city, was the fifth victim. A patrol found her with some valuable trinkets in a Blacklake alleyway; she had multiple stab wounds and a slit throat. It didn't take the guards long to add her name to the list of unsolved murders.

Today (Murder 6): Turom Cadel, the Mintarn soldier killed in front of the adventurers in the market, appears to be the sixth victim.

Event 2: Hitting the Streets

Skill Challenge Level 4 (350 XP)

Without much to go on, the adventurers can start their investigation by visiting the various crime scenes and questioning locals who bore witness to the recent deaths or who have information of merit.

Investigating these murders takes you to crime scenes scattered across the city: from the bustling market to trash-filled alleyways, from upscale shops locked from within to Blackwater shacks that couldn't keep a rat out.

Six murders in a week cannot be an unfortunate coincidence or a run of terrible luck. The guards might be at a loss to explain what is happening, but they have preserved what they could of the crime scenes for the adventurers to examine.

See the "Making Sense of the Senseless" sidebar for the specific clues the adventurers can uncover as they work the murders.

MAKING SENSE OF THE SENSELESS

As the adventurers investigate the murders in the skill challenges of Events 2 and 4, they can uncover clues that hint at what is happening. You can award a new piece of evidence each time the heroes gain a success in one of the skill challenges. Each entry in the "General Clues" and "Specific Clues" sidebars mentions two skills that are likely used to discover it, but you can modify this information to fit your players' ideas and how you want the investigation to unfold. For example, it is just as plausible that a witness saw a body being posed as it is that the adventurers examined the body or the scene to come to a similar conclusion.

GENERAL CLUES

- The sizes and shapes of the wounds indicate that none of the victims were killed with the same weapon. (Heal, Perception)
- The pooled blood does not match the position of the bodies, indicating that the killer posed the corpses after the murders took place. Each victim but the last was spread-eagled, signifying that they died in a variety of more natural positions. (Heal, Perception)
- The blows were strong and penetrated deeply, but the lack of tearing and secondary damage suggests that the killer did not deliver them in rage. (Insight, Heal)
- No signs of any confrontation or buildup to a conflict exist at any of the scenes—clues indicate a sudden and invariably lethal attack. (Insight, Perception).
- The attacks appear to have been ambushes, but many of the locations in which they took place were public, well lit, or heavily traveled—hardly the spots in which one would choose to carry out a murder. (Streetwise, Thievery)
- Nobody found the usual calling cards or gang signs on the bodies, and none claim the kills, which is all but unheard of in a gang or political assassination. (Streetwise, Thievery)
- Nightmares about the murders are common in the neighborhoods nearest to the locations of the murders, but people expect that to happen when murders such as these occur. Some, however, began before the death in question was discovered. (Diplomacy, Insight)
- No one recalls seeing anyone who stood out during the times of the murders. Some tell of a few instances of people being "out of it" or stumbling a bit from drink, sure, but nothing extraordinary. (Diplomacy, Streetwise)
- Faded traces of the magical signature found on the mind-controlled mob exist at each of the crime scenes. (Arcana; Event 4 only)
- The magic involved fairly crackles with Spellplague energy, but something is alien about it as well. (Arcana; Event 4 only)

Level: 4.

Complexity: 2 (requires 6 successes before 3 failures).

Primary Skills: Diplomacy, Heal, Insight, Perception, Streetwise.

Diplomacy (DC 14, two successes maximum): A kind word and carefully guided conversation gets traumatized witnesses to open up and share more of what happened than they otherwise would have.

Heal (DC 14, two successes maximum): The character uses knowledge of physiology to come to a conclusion about some piece of evidence.

Insight (DC 14, two successes maximum): The character scrutinizes the murder scenes, looking for a pattern that might lead to the killer.

Perception (DC 14, two successes maximum): Canvassing the crime scenes uncovers important clues that the untrained eye would miss.

Streetwise (DC 14, two successes maximum): Not even the best cover-up by the authorities can entirely silence the streets, and the character knows where to go to pick up the latest whisperings.

Success: The information the adventurers uncover supports Telliann's fears that more is happening

SPECIFIC CLUES

Each of the following clues is tied to the circumstances of a particular murder.

- ✦ Hurvast Marx's body was looted some time after his death, making it extremely unlikely that his death was the result of a robbery attempt gone wrong. (Perception, Thievery)
- ✦ The homeless man who killed Riac "the Knife" had no gang affiliation and no apparent reason for attacking an armed and dangerous ruffian. (Diplomacy, Streetwise)
- ✦ Credar Longstaff's corpse bears the marks of multiple weapons, indicating that several assailants killed him. The damage was not caused by the axes one expects to find in an orc raid, but rather the wounds came from a number of swords, daggers, and possibly a halberd. (Heal, Perception)
- ✦ Danas Winterpole's shop was intact, without a single cracked windowpane, loose shingle, or pick mark on the lock to indicate how someone could have broken into the place. (Perception, Thievery)
- ✦ Sabel Estwick appears to have been stabbed only after she had died, and her death was due to her throat being slit. (Heal, Perception)
- ✦ The man who killed the guard Turom in front of the adventurers was a local merchant named Andros. Those who knew him cannot believe what happened, swearing that he was a good person and an honest businessman who could never kill anyone, least of all a guard he didn't even know. (Diplomacy, Streetwise)

here than a string of common murders. Figuring out exactly what, though, requires more investigation. Proceed to Event 3.

Failure: If the party discovered fewer than three clues, reveal as many as required to bring the number up to three. These can come from guards who remember important details, witnesses who come forward voluntarily, or even pure persistence on the adventurers' parts.

The incomplete intelligence the adventurers scrape together might indicate that something strange is going on, but the case is not as strong as it could be, so more investigation is required. Proceed to Event 3, but the adventurers are automatically surprised and grant combat advantage until the end of their first turn.

Treasure: None.

Event 3: Investigation Interrupted

Combat Encounter Level 4 (985 XP)

The aboleth cannot risk the adventurers interfering with its great plans and sends a mob of dominated citizens to take care of the nosey heroes.

Perception DC 14: The adventurer notices the sudden change in the locals and, if the heroes succeeded in the Event 2 skill challenge, is not surprised.

Light: Bright light (daylight or torches and lanterns).

Monsters: 10 human goons (H), 3 town guards (T), 3 market green grifters (M).

This small square was the scene of one of the recent murders. Modest shops and private homes line the area, and a handful of locals move about their business while a few guards watch.

As one, the bystanders tilt their heads to the side as if listening to a distant noise, then turn empty stares in your direction before lurching toward you menacingly.

If the adventurers failed the skill challenge in Event 2, the sudden onslaught catches them in the middle of their investigation, granting their enemies the element of surprise.

Crates: The stacks of heavy merchandise are sturdy enough to provide cover and are difficult terrain.

Buildings: The unassuming buildings are simple enough to enter through an unlocked door or window, but the tight packing of goods stored inside them makes every interior square difficult terrain. Their roofs are 10 feet off the ground.

Treasure: The adventurers find a total of 50 gp on the three grifters.

Tactics: The goons rush the adventurers, attempting to surround them while remaining near enough to one another to benefit from *mob rule*. The guards prefer to strike from behind a protective wall of minions, from where they can safely keep a hero marked without fear of retaliation. The grifters weave through melee, moving to ensure that they can reach a juicy target that is adjacent to at least one ally when they use *back from the dead*. They make opportunity attacks while they wait for the chance to use *play dead* again.

Any of the mind-controlled townsfolk that are knocked unconscious or otherwise captured instead of killed remember little of what transpired, but questioning them provides bonuses to the Event 4 skill challenge (see that section for more information).

10 Human Goons (H) **Level 2 Minion Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 31 each

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. **Initiative** +3
AC 15, **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 11, **Will** 11 **Perception** +2
Speed 6

Traits

Mob Rule
While at least two other human goons are within 5 squares of the goon, it gains a +2 power bonus to all defenses.

Standard Actions

Club (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. AC
Hit: 5 damage.

Str 14 (+3)	**Dex** 11 (+1)	**Wis** 12 (+2)
Con 12 (+2)	**Int** 9 (+0)	**Cha** 13 (+2)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment club

3 Town Guards (T) **Level 3 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 150 each

HP 47; **Bloodied** 23 **Initiative** +5
AC 19, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 14 **Perception** +6
Speed 5

Standard Actions

Halberd (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +8 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 5 damage, and the town guard marks the target until the end of the town guard's next turn.

Crossbow (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +8 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 5 damage.

Powerful Strike (weapon) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +8 vs. AC
Hit: 2d10 + 5 damage, and the target falls prone.

Triggered Actions

Interceding Strike (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: An enemy marked by the town guard makes an attack that doesn't include it as a target.
Attack (Immediate Interrupt): Melee 2 (triggering enemy); +8 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 5 damage.

Skills Streetwise +7

Str 16 (+4)	**Dex** 14 (+3)	**Wis** 11 (+1)
Con 15 (+3)	**Int** 10 (+1)	**Cha** 12 (+2)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment chainmail, halberd, crossbow, 20 bolts

3 Market Green Grifters (M) **Level 2 Lurker**
Medium natural humanoid, half-elf XP 125 each

HP 28; **Bloodied** 14 **Initiative** +7
AC 16, **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 15 **Perception** +1
Speed 6

Traits

River Rat Tactics
The grifter has combat advantage against any enemy that is adjacent to at least one of the grifter's allies.

Standard Actions

Short Sword (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 4 damage.

Play Dead (charm) ✦ **Recharge** when the grifter uses *back from the dead*
Requirement: The grifter must have taken damage during the encounter.
Effect: The grifter falls prone. Until the start of its next turn, it gains a +5 power bonus to all defenses against close attacks and area attacks, and enemies think it is dead. An enemy cannot make a melee attack or a ranged attack against the grifter unless that enemy succeeds on a DC 20 Insight check as a minor action.

Back from the Dead ✦ **Recharge** when the grifter uses *play dead*
Requirement: The grifter must be prone.
Effect: The grifter stands up, shifts up to 3 squares, and uses *short sword* three times against one enemy. Each of these attacks deals half damage on a miss.

Triggered Actions

The Jig Is Up ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The grifter drops to 0 hit points.
Effect (Immediate Interrupt): The grifter instead has 1 hit point. If the grifter is prone, it stands up. In addition, the grifter can shift up to 3 squares.

Skills Bluff +9, Diplomacy +9, Insight +6, Stealth +8, Streetwise +9

Str 12 (+2)	**Dex** 14 (+3)	**Wis** 10 (+1)
Con 10 (+1)	**Int** 13 (+2)	**Cha** 17 (+4)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment leather armor, short sword

Event 4: Hitting the Streets, Again

Skill Challenge Level 4 (350 XP)

The sudden mobbing might have stopped the adventurers' investigation for a few minutes, but it also opened a whole new avenue of inquiry.

More crime scenes are scattered about the city to examine, but now it is obvious that something else is going on.

The sudden attack by normal townsfolk under the influence of an outside force opens up new leads for the adventurers to pursue alongside their traditional detective work.

See the sidebars on pages 5 and 6 for the clues the adventurers can uncover as they work the murders.

Level: 4.

Complexity: 2 (6 successes before 3 failures).

Primary Skills: Arcana, Diplomacy, Heal, Insight, Perception, Streetwise.

Arcana (DC 14, two successes maximum): Although the trace amount of magical energy found at the murder scenes might have been faint enough to avoid detection, the recent display of power was anything but subtle. Now that the adventurer knows what to look for, he or she can pick out the magical signature and analyze it at each location. A DC 21 check result counts as two successes.

Diplomacy (DC 14, two successes maximum): Interviewing witnesses and chatting up the first guards on the scene remain an effective way of gathering information. If the adventurers captured (instead of killed) any of the townsfolk that attacked them in Event 3, they gain a +2 bonus to Diplomacy checks made as part of this challenge.

Heal (DC 14, two successes maximum): Facts about the victims' bodies, whether gained from direct observation or through talking to others, lead the character to an understanding of more of the details of the case.

Insight (DC 14, two successes maximum): Insightful adventurers can surmise that the recent attack by mind-controlled citizens offers hints as to who might be behind all this madness. If the adventurers captured (instead of killed) any of the townsfolk that attacked them in Event 3, they gain a +2 bonus to Insight checks made as part of this skill challenge.

Perception (DC 14, two successes maximum): Whether scrutinizing the remainder of the crime scenes or the bodies of those that attacked the party, the hero's keen senses turn up valuable pieces to the puzzle.

Streetwise (DC 14, two successes maximum): This latest event stirred up the rumor mill, offering a plethora of opportunities for an adventurer to pick up useful information.

Success: The wealth of information the party uncovers confirms that these were no ordinary crimes of revenge or passion. Combined with the recent encounter with a mob of mentally dominated townsfolk, it is clear that a third party is enthralling conveniently located bystanders to carry out bizarrely formulaic atrocities. Proceed to Event 5.

Failure: If the party discovered fewer than three clues during the course of the skill challenge, reveal as many as required to bring the number up to three. These can come from guards who remember important details, witnesses who come forward voluntarily, or even pure persistence on the part of the heroes.

The adventurers connect the mob attack to the strange murders, but their less than successful investigation has left them with fewer pieces of evidence to support their findings. Because their grasp of the facts is not as strong as it could have been, they are less sure of themselves and thus more susceptible to the machinations of the aboleth. Proceed to Event 5, but the adventurers contract whispering madness at stage 2 instead of stage 1.

Treasure: None.

Event 5: Wailing Madness

Combat Encounter Level 4 (892 XP)

A band of plaguechanged backed up by more mind-controlled civilians attack from the sewer, interrupting the heroes as they report their findings to Telliann.

Light: Bright light (daylight or lanterns at night).

Monsters: 2 nothic mindwarps (N), 3 plaguechanged wretches (P), 7 human goons (H).

Telliann is right where she said she would meet you in the marketplace. When she catches sight of you, she waves you over, eager to hear what you have uncovered.

If the adventurers take longer than a few days or arrive late at night, one of the guards perpetually patrolling the market fetches Telliann from the nearby inn. Adjust the read-aloud text as accordingly.

The monsters do not attack until the heroes have had a chance to explain their findings to Telliann, who is clearly impressed with how much they've uncovered. After pleasantries have been dealt with and the adventurers have had a chance to regale her with any tales they wish to tell, the encounter begins.

When the adventurers have finished recounting, read:

Telliann nods. "So there is a mastermind behind all these attacks after all—one who is using innocent people as his weapons. I cannot say that I am relieved by your findings, but I am thankful to you for—" Her congratulations are cut short by a wailing shriek that scrabbles at the edges of your mind, whereupon Telliann clutches her head, lets out a scream, and crumples, unconscious, to the ground.

At the same time, three twisted humanoids dripping blue fire from their malformed bodies heave themselves out of the nearby sewer grates, quickly followed by a pair of hideous, creatures each boasting a single, enormous eye. Most of the nearby market-goers are rendered unconscious by the

shriek or flee in abject terror. The handful that remain turn their slack faces toward you and stagger forward.

Place the monsters where indicated on the map. Telliann plays no part in the encounter and has no combat training. If her location becomes relevant, place her unconscious body near where the adventurers started.

Stalls: The market stalls provide cover and are difficult terrain.

Armand's Amazing Armaments: Weaponry hangs in this blue and green stall. A creature that is forcibly moved into or falls prone in the stall's squares takes 5 damage from the dozens of freshly sharpened blades it tumbles over. At least one of every weapon found in *Heroes of the Fallen Lands* and *Heroes of the Forgotten Kingdoms* is within and can be "borrowed" by the adventurers during the battle.

Duram's Alchemic: This red and yellow stall is stocked with volatile alchemical compounds, explosive mixtures, and no small amount of the strong alcohol Duram is renowned for swilling. A DC 14 Arcana check made as a minor action while within 10 feet of the stall reveals that it is a fire trap just waiting for a spark to set it off. If the stall, any of its squares, or a creature occupying one of its squares takes fire damage or is subject to an attack that deals fire damage, the stall explodes, making the following attack.

Attack: Close burst 2 (creatures in the burst); +7 vs. Reflex

Hit: 2d10 fire damage, and the target is pushed 2 squares and falls prone.

Sewer Grates: These now uncovered shafts drop 10 feet into the sewer below. A creature forcibly moved onto one is entitled to a saving throw to catch itself; otherwise it falls into the sewer, taking damage as normal.

Treasure: None.

Tactics: The goons and the wretches charge into combat, ganging up on single adventurers whenever possible and disregarding their personal safety if a chance to attack a vulnerable adventurer presents itself. The nothics focus on single but separate targets, reserving their burst power for when they can catch multiple enemies at once.

Development: When the encounter is resolved, Telliann comes awake and stands up. The characters have a chance to fill her in on what has just transpired. Allow the players an opportunity for role-playing, and then proceed to Event 6.

Whispering Madness

The deranged aboleth behind the current situation has hijacked a portion of the energy coming from the Spellplague pocket that resides under Neverwinter and is using it to amplify its already frightening ability to influence or dominate the minds of others. Unfortunately for the heroes, they have caught the beast's attention, and it spends the rest of the adventure attempting to exert control over them with subtle whispers of madness and probing tendrils of psychic power, slowly wearing at the edges of their sanity.

This malign influence functions mechanically much like a disease; unlike most diseases, however, the effects of the stages are cumulative. In the game, the heroes' crumbling hold on sanity manifests in visions, nightmares, half-heard whispers, growing feelings of paranoia or oppressive dread, and uncontrollable destructive urges or bouts of rage. (See the "Nightmare Portents" sidebar for suggestions for nightmares and visions.) Eventually the symptoms manifest physically in the form of temporary mutations reminiscent of the plaguechanged.

When the psychic scream kicks off the encounter, the heroes are all afflicted with whispering madness (stage 1). If the heroes failed the Event 4 skill challenge, they start off at stage 2 instead. To end the whispering madness, the heroes must kill the aboleth responsible (see Event 12).

Whispering Madness **Level 4 Disease**

Horrid whispers test your sanity and begin to devour it.

Stage 0: The only way to reach this stage, and thereby end the disease, is to destroy the creature that infected the target.

Stage 1: While affected by stage 1, the target loses a healing surge. If the target takes damage from a single source equal to or greater than its Intelligence score, it must make a saving throw at the end of that encounter. If the saving throw fails, the stage increases by 1.

Stage 2: While affected by stage 2, as above. In addition, the target grants combat advantage whenever it is adjacent to two or more creatures.

Stage 3: While affected by stage 3, as above. In addition, while bloodied, the target must make a basic attack as a free action against the nearest creature at the start of each of its turns.

Stage 4: While affected by stage 4, as above. In addition, the target takes a –2 penalty to all defenses against the attacks of aberrant creatures and a –2 penalty to saving throws to end effects caused by aberrant creatures. The target also deals 1d6 extra fire damage with its attacks while bloodied.

Stage 5: While affected by stage 5, the target is dominated by the creature that infected it and receives telepathic instructions from that creature. The target also gains resist 5 fire.

Check: At the end of each extended rest, the target makes an Arcana check or Insight check.

9 or Lower: The stage increases by 1.

10–13: No change.

14 or Higher: The stage decreases by 1, to a minimum of 1.

NIGHTMARE VISIONS AND PORTENTS

Prolonged contact with the incomprehensibly alien and malicious mind of a plaguechanged aboleth is extraordinarily harmful to one's mental health, something the adventurers no doubt discover as they suffer the insanity-inducing effects of the beast's attentions. Presented below are a few example nightmare visions that the adventurers might be afflicted with while suffering from whispering madness or while confronting the aboleth directly. Tailoring the nightmares to each adventurer's dreams and fears (or the player's, if you want to go there) can make the experience much more engaging and memorable for everyone. These nightmares are also an excellent way to work in subtle clues for whatever future you might have planned for the campaign, whether it is something as simple as introducing the Abolethic Sovereignty as a threat or as far-ranging as hinting at its plans to release the chained primordial Maegera upon the world.

Of course, this sort of mental trauma is not lightly tossed aside, even by hardened adventurers, and anything they experience could haunt them for the rest of their careers, which gives you the perfect opening to remind them where they came from, tie future exploits to the course of what they have already accomplished, drop plot information without introducing new elements, or even just keep them on their toes.

- Your world becomes a sea of brilliant azure fire that presses around you, its shining caress a thing of unimaginable beauty that quickly turns to terror as your blood begins to boil and your flesh sizzles, pops, and runs like candle wax to set in new and horrifying forms. The pain burns brighter than the ocean of flame that surrounds you, but you do not die.
- An eyeless horror of twisted human meat kneels before you, its leathery outer layer pulled taut over malformed bones and unnatural growths. An inhuman scream issues from a ragged hole in what must have once been its face. Chaotic, fleeting images of fire, death, and pain burst unbidden into your thoughts, threatening to overwhelm your sanity as the abhorrent shrieking tears at the edges of your mind.
- Neverwinter's nightmares are made manifest as, with a thunder louder than Kord's own, Hotenow explodes anew. Its sides shudder and slough off like blazing snakeskin to join the clouds of searing ash and azure lighting hurtling toward the doomed city. As the sky goes dark and death presses close, a terrible roar pregnant with unbearable rage and power crashes down upon you, drowning out even the approaching avalanche.

2 Nothic Mindwarps (N) **Level 3 Lurker**
Medium aberrant humanoid XP 150 each

HP 42; **Bloodied** 21 **Initiative** +8
AC 17, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 13 **Perception** +2
Speed 6 Darkvision, truesight 10

Standard Actions

⊕ **Claw** ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 4 damage.

Warping Gaze (illusion, psychic) ✦ **Recharge** when an enemy saves against this power
Attack: Ranged 5 (one enemy); +6 vs. Will
Hit: 2d6 + 4 psychic damage, and the target grants combat advantage (save ends). Until the target saves against this effect, the nothic is invisible to every enemy but the target, and its *claw* deals 1d6 extra damage to the target.
Miss: The nothic has partial concealment until the end of its next turn.

Forbidding Glare (fear, psychic) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Close burst 2 (enemies in the burst); +6 vs. Will
Hit: 1d8 + 4 psychic damage, and the nothic pushes the target up to 2 squares.
Miss: Half damage, and the nothic can push the target 1 square.

Skills Stealth +9
Str 16 (+4) **Dex** 16 (+4) **Wis** 12 (+2)
Con 18 (+5) **Int** 8 (+0) **Cha** 9 (+0)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Deep Speech

3 Plaguechanged Wretches (P) **Level 2 Controller**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 125 each

HP 37; **Bloodied** 18 **Initiative** +4
AC 16, **Fortitude** 12, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 12 **Perception** +1
Speed 6

Standard Actions

⊕ **Coldfire Claw** (cold, fire) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 5 fire and cold damage, and the target is slowed (save ends).

Triggered Actions

Blue Fire Burst (fire, force) ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The wretch becomes bloodied.
Attack (Immediate Reaction): Close burst 2 (creatures in the burst); +5 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d8 + 2 fire and force damage, and the wretch pushes the target up to 2 squares.
Miss: Half damage.

Str 12 (+2) **Dex** 17 (+4) **Wis** 11 (+1)
Con 13 (+2) **Int** 6 (-1) **Cha** 10 (+1)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

7 Human Goons (H) **Level 2 Minion Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 31 each

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. **Initiative** +3
AC 15, **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 11, **Will** 11 **Perception** +2
Speed 6

Traits

Mob Rule
While at least two other human goons are within 5 squares of the goon, it gains a +2 power bonus to all defenses.

Standard Actions

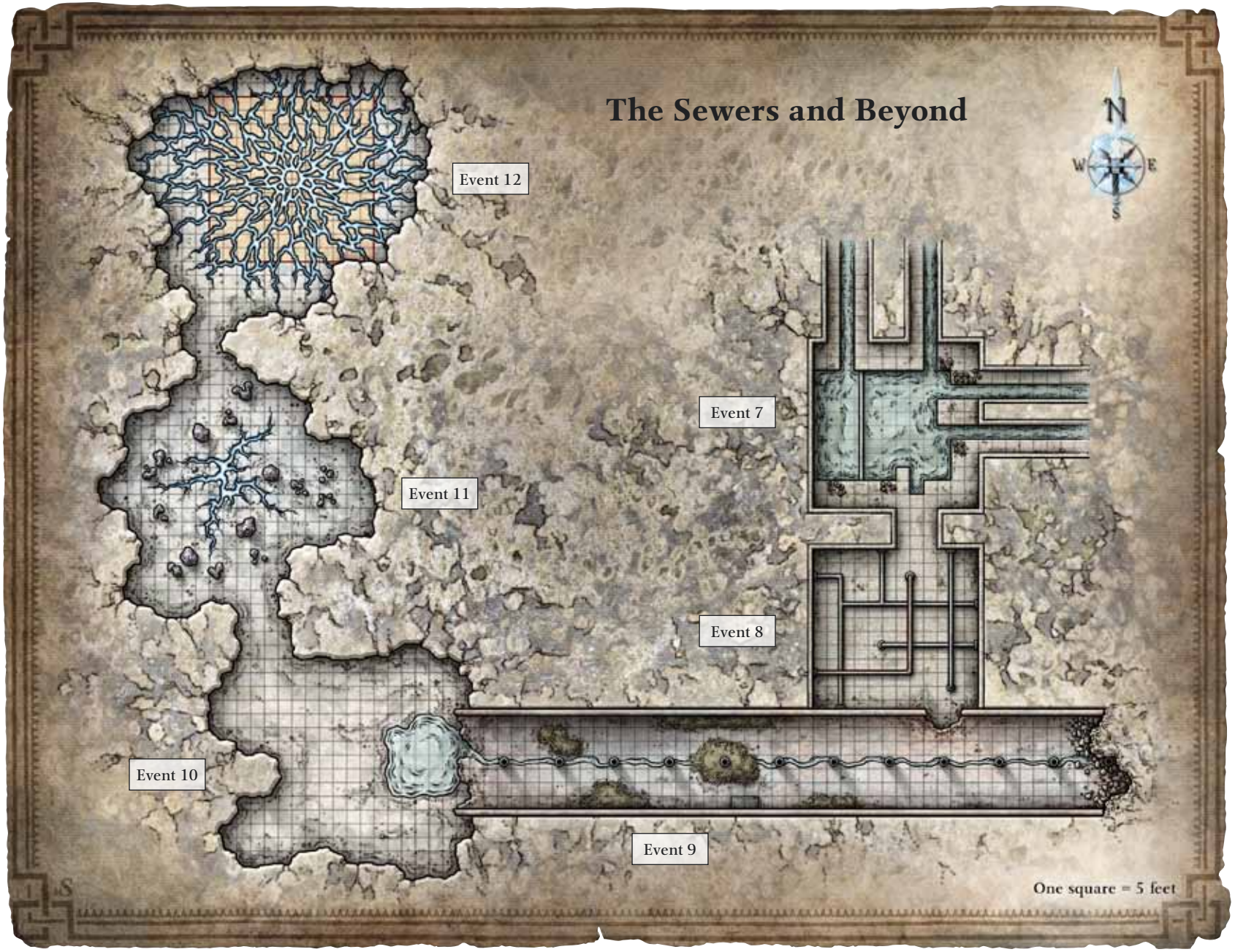
⊕ **Club** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. AC
Hit: 5 damage.

Str 14 (+3) **Dex** 11 (+1) **Wis** 12 (+2)
Con 12 (+2) **Int** 9 (+0) **Cha** 13 (+2)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment club

CHARACTER THEME OPTIONS

The following nightmare visions are designed to pair with particular character themes, but you should feel free to adapt them as necessary.

- ✦ **Neverwinter Noble:** Ash and blood mingle in the street as Neverwinter burns around you. The ragged bodies of soldiers and civilians alike lay where they fell—where you failed them. They looked to you with hope in their eyes and trust in their hearts and your rule brought naught but a death you were too cowardly to share.
- ✦ **Spellscarred Harbinger:** With a sudden, burning pain, a shimmering blue fire begins to spread uncontrollably from your spellscar, your flesh rippling and quivering obscenely at its agonizing touch. The sickening sounds of bones cracking and flesh tearing accompany its progress, your body finally succumbing to the Spellplague and twisting into a plaguechanged monstrosity as your mind is lost to an endless sea of pain.
- ✦ **Heir of Delzoun:** Corrupted Gauntlgrym opens before you, its formerly grand halls the haunt of malformed horrors that befoul dwarven honor with every rasping breath they take. Putrid oozes obscure the walls and climb over the disfigured statues of ancient heroes as the stone weeps tears of bubbling pitch in shame.
- ✦ **Oghma's Faithful:** The library surrounds you, but as you progress through its many shelves, comfort and security are replaced with lingering dread and welling panic. The clear light begins to fade and half-glimpsed but monstrous shapes stalk you from the growing shadows as the reassuring musty perfume turns to stinking brine and rotting fish. Unintelligible whispers slither from the darkness, and the countless tomes take on a sinister aspect, the weight of their presence pressing in around you as if to smother you.


The Sewers and Beyond
N
W
E
S
Event 12
Event 7
Event 11
Event 8
Event 10
Event 9
One square = 5 feet

Event 6: Scouring the Sewers

Skill Challenge Level 4 (350 XP)

The heroes must track their quarry back to its lair in the foul-smelling maze of sewers that runs beneath the city.

The lingering, acrid stench of the unnatural creatures that just assailed you is quickly overwhelmed by the entirely natural, if equally unpleasant, odor of a city's worth of waste as you peer into the moist darkness of the sewer grates that lie open nearby.

If the adventurers do not hit upon the idea of tracking the plaguechanged back to their lair by going into the sewer, Telliann encourages them to do so. They can proceed through by entering one or both grates, since the passages ultimately lead to the same place.

This skill challenge simulates the characters' making their way through the sewer system, withstanding the physical effects of the place while staying on the trail of what they seek.

Level: 4.
Complexity: 2 (6 successes before 3 failures).
Primary Skills: Arcana, Dungeoneering, Endurance, Perception, Streetwise.

Arcana (DC 14, two successes maximum): Plaguechanged and aberrant creatures leave telltale traces of their passing that can be detected by a skilled practitioner of the arcane arts, much like a hunter reading footprints. An adventurer with a spellscar gains a +2 bonus to his or her Arcana checks to track the plaguechanged.

Dungeoneering (DC 14, two successes maximum): Navigating the stinking maze of tunnels is no problem for a seasoned and knowledgeable dungeon explorer.

Endurance (DC 10; group check, two successes maximum): Disease, toxic fumes, grasping sludge, and other hazards pose no problems for the adventurers, who soldier forward. Each makes the Endurance check; the party gains one success if at least half the checks are successful.

Perception (DC 14, two successes maximum): Scratched stonework, disturbed slimy growths, and scattered droplets of foul ichor are as good as a map for those with the skill to follow such clues. A hero with a spellscar gains a +2 bonus to his or her Perception checks to track the plaguechanged.

Streetwise (DC 21, two successes maximum): Correlating the haphazard mess of tunnels with the streets above is challenging but provides valuable navigational aid and insights into which areas might host a plaguechanged lair.

Success: The adventurers track the plaguechanged back to their lair. Proceed to Event 7.

Failure: The adventurers stumble upon the lair, but the natural hazards of the sewer system have taken their toll: Each adventurer loses a healing surge. Proceed to Event 7.

Treasure: None.

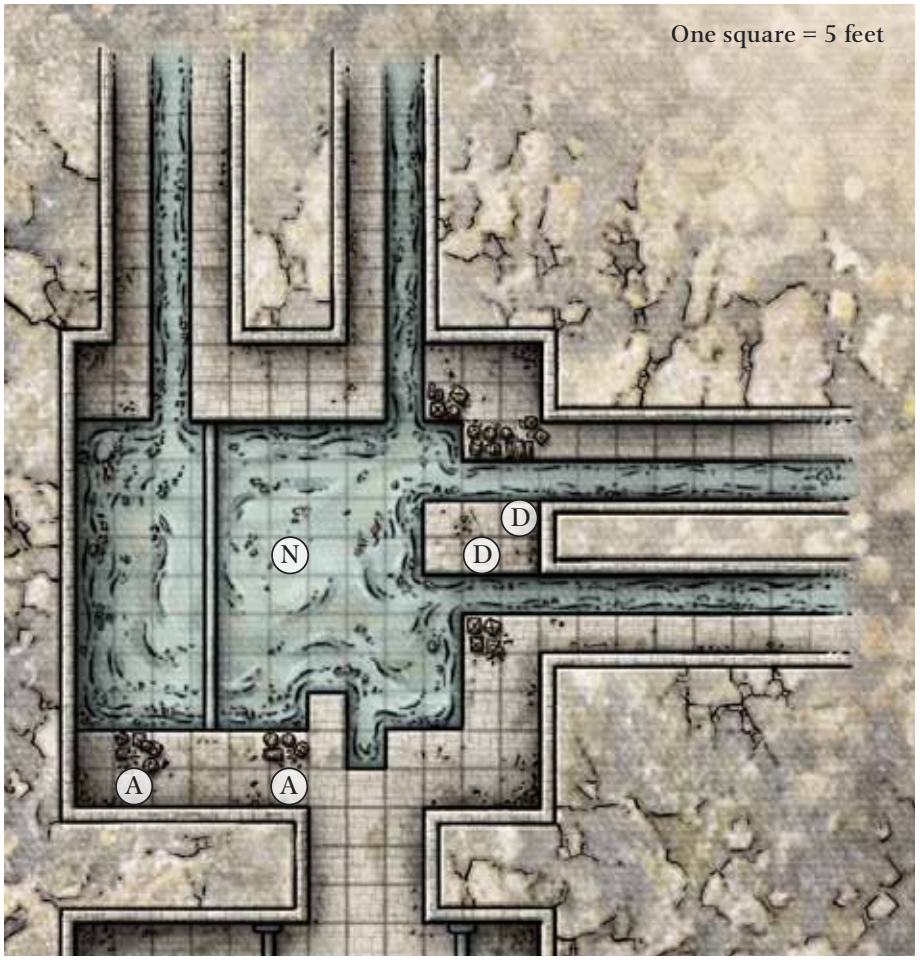
Event 7: Outer Defenses

Combat Encounter Level 5 (1,000 XP)

The aboleth's first line of defense consists primarily of dominated thralls that have been ordered to kill any who wander into the area.

Perception DC 21: The keen-eyed adventurer spots the lurking nothic plaguegazer.

Light: Bright (torches).



Monsters: 1 nothic plaguegazer (N), 2 dragonborn soldiers (D), 2 orc archers (A).

Ahead, a number of tunnels come together, their contents flowing into an open chamber that boasts a truly impressive stench. Two bulky dragonborn shuffle in little circles near the center of the open area. A pair of longbow-toting orcs stands on the far side of the space, staring into nothingness.

The nothic is hiding in the toxic sludge. Do not place it until it moves to attack or is spotted by an adventurer.

Toxic Sewage: The stinking sludge flowing through the area has been contaminated by the nothic plaguegazer's prolonged presence. A creature that falls into the sewage takes 5 poison damage. Creatures in the sewage take ongoing 5 poison damage while they remain in the goo. The reeking filth is 10 feet deep and requires a DC 14 Athletics check to swim through. The nothic does not take damage from the sewage, but it does need to make checks to traverse it.

Slime-Covered Pipe: This ancient iron pipe is 1 foot in diameter and surprisingly sturdy, but the slick coating of slime on its surface makes balancing treacherous. A DC 14 Acrobatics check is required to move along it. Each square requires 1 additional square of movement to enter, as normal. Failure ends the mover's action immediately, and on a failure by 5 or more, the creature falls from the pipe.

Moldering Crates: These decaying crates and barrels look to have once been filled with bulk goods, though it is hard to tell now. They provide cover and are difficult terrain.

Treasure: The adventurers find two *potions of healing*, 80 gp, and a common level 7 item stashed in one of the decaying crates.

Tactics: The dragonborn charge into melee with whoever attempts to cross the pool first, and they try to prevent the adventurers from reaching the ranged attackers. The orcs take cover and rain arrows down upon the adventurers. They are especially fond of pushing adventurers into the sewage. The nothic uses *sickening gaze* to slow or immobilize dangerous melee combatants while waiting for an opportunity to use *spread the plague*.

Nothic Plaguegazer (N) — **Level 6 Artillery**
Medium aberrant humanoid — XP 250

HP 60; **Bloodied** 30 — **Initiative** +7
AC 20, **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 16 — **Perception** +5
Speed 6 — Darkvision, truesight 10

Traits

Oozing Plague (poison)
Any creature that ends its turn adjacent to the nothic takes ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

Standard Actions

Claw ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 8 damage.

Sickening Gaze (necrotic, poison) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +11 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 1d6 + 3 necrotic damage, and the target is slowed and takes ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends both).
First Failed Saving Throw: The target is immobilized instead of slowed.

Spread the Infection (necrotic, poison) ✦ **Recharge** when first bloodied
Attack: Area burst 1 centered on a creature taking ongoing poison damage within 10 (creatures in the burst); +11 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 1d6 + 3 necrotic damage, and ongoing 10 poison damage (save ends).
Miss: Half damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

Skills Stealth +12

Str 15 (+5)	**Dex** 18 (+7)	**Wis** 14 (+5)
Con 18 (+7)	**Int** 10 (+3)	**Cha** 9 (+2)

Alignment unaligned — **Languages** Deep Speech

2 Dragonborn Soldiers (D) — **Level 5 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid — XP 200 each

HP 63; **Bloodied** 31 — **Initiative** +6
AC 21, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 15 — **Perception** +3
Speed 5

Standard Actions

Longsword (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC, or +11 vs. AC while the dragonborn is bloodied.
Hit: 1d8 + 9 damage.

Minor Actions

Dragon Breath (cold) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in the blast); +8 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d6 + 4 cold damage.

Triggered Actions

Impetuous Spirit (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: An enemy leaves a square adjacent to the dragonborn.
Effect (Immediate Interrupt): The dragonborn uses *longsword* against the triggering enemy.

Martial Recovery ✦ **Recharge** when the dragonborn uses *impetuous spirit*
Trigger: The dragonborn misses an enemy with *longsword*.
Effect (Free Action): The dragonborn uses *longsword* against the triggering enemy again.

Str 16 (+5)	**Dex** 15 (+4)	**Wis** 12 (+3)
Con 15 (+4)	**Int** 11 (+2)	**Cha** 9 (+1)

Alignment unaligned — **Languages** Common, Draconic
Equipment scale armor, light shield, longsword

2 Orc Archers (A)	Level 4 Artillery
Medium natural humanoid	XP 175 each
HP 42; **Bloodied** 21	**Initiative** +6
AC 16, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 14	**Perception** +2
Speed 6	Low-light vision
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Handaxe** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d6 + 6 damage.	
Longbow (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Ranged 30 (one creature); +11 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d10 + 6 damage, and the orc can push the target 1 square.	
Clustered Volley (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Area burst 1 within 20 (creatures in the burst); +9 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d10 + 6 damage.	
Triggered Actions	
Savage Demise ✦ **Encounter**	
Trigger: The orc drops to 0 hit points.	
Effect (Free Action): The orc takes a standard action.	
Str 15 (+4) **Dex** 18 (+6) **Wis** 10 (+2)	
Con 12 (+3) **Int** 8 (+1) **Cha** 9 (+1)	
Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Giant	
Equipment leather armor, handaxe, longbow, 30 arrows	

Event 8: Pipe Works

Combat Encounter Level 5 (1,008 XP)

Another band of thralls guards the rusted entrance into the enormous sewage pipe that leads to the aboleth's lair.

Perception DC 14: The adventurer notices the high pressure, hair-thin streams of sewage spraying from tiny cracks and from around the bolts of one of the pipes.

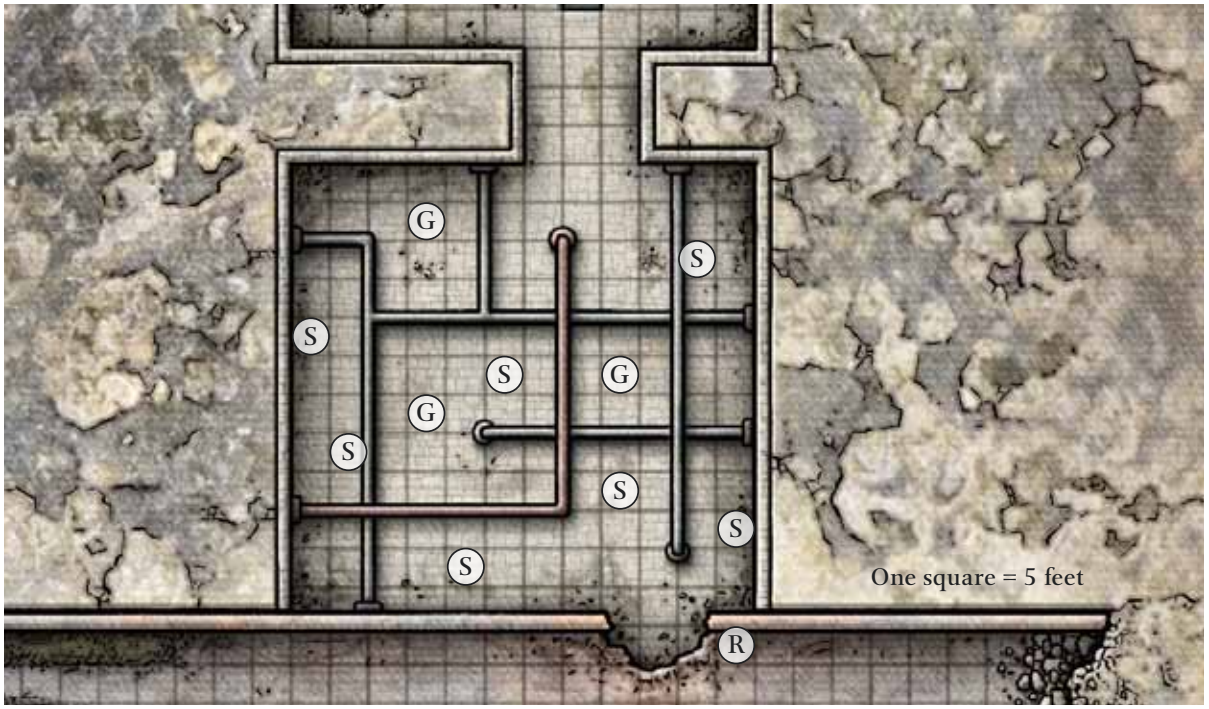
Light: Bright (torches).

Monsters: 1 rust monster (R), 3 town guards (G), 7 orc savages (S).

The passage you are following opens into a fairly spacious area dominated by a gargantuan pipe whose outer surface runs along one wall. A series of small pipes crisscrosses the room in all directions. A few Mintarn guards and a larger number of rough-looking orcs mill aimlessly through the maze of piping. The sounds of something moving within the big pipe echo out into the chamber.

The rust monster starts inside the big pipe, so the characters cannot see it or have line of effect to it until they move closer to the opening or the rust monster moves out.

Giant Pipe: Only a portion of this great pipe is exposed; the majority of its bulk remains buried. Climbing around on the rounded exterior of the pipe requires a DC 14 Athletics check. A large hole has rusted open on one side and allows access to the pipe's interior, which leads west to Event 9 (travel east is barred by impassable debris, the result of a partial collapse).



Rust Monster (R)	Level 6 Skirmisher
Medium natural beast	XP 250
HP 66; **Bloodied** 33	**Initiative** +10
AC 20, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 17	**Perception** +5
Speed 8	Low-light vision

Traits

Rusting Defense

Whenever an attack using a metal weapon hits the rust monster, the weapon used in the attack is rusting until the end of the encounter. While the weapon is rusting, attacks with the weapon take a -1 penalty to attack rolls. If the weapon used to attack the rust monster is already rusting, the penalty to attack rolls worsens by 1 (to a maximum penalty of -5).

Standard Actions

Bite ✦ At-Will

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC

Hit: 2d8 + 5 damage. If the target is wearing heavy armor, the armor is rusting until the end of the encounter. While the armor is rusting, the target takes a -1 penalty to AC. If the target is wearing armor that is already rusting, increase the penalty to AC by 1 (to a maximum penalty of -5).

Effect: The rust monster shifts 1 square.

Devour Metal ✦ Recharge if the power misses

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature wearing or wielding a rusting item); +9 vs. Reflex

Hit: The rusting item is destroyed. If the item was magical, *residuum* worth the item's market value can be retrieved from the rust monster after the creature is slain.

Str 8 (+2)	**Dex** 20 (+8)	**Wis** 15 (+5)
Con 10 (+3)	**Int** 2 (-1)	**Cha** 12 (+4)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

Smaller Pipes: These iron pipes are of more modest stature, averaging less than 2 feet wide. They run across the chamber at waist or chest height, provide cover, and require 1 additional square of movement to clamber over or under. A creature can move along the pipes with a DC 14 Acrobatics check.

The contents of the red pipe are under great pressure and will explode outward if the pipe is breached. If a character or a creature uses Thievery on the pipe in an attempt to breach it or attacks the pipe, the pressurized sewage could come blasting out, making an attack that originates in the square of the breached pipe.

3 Town Guards (G)	Level 3 Soldier
Medium natural humanoid, human	XP 150 each
HP 47; **Bloodied** 23	**Initiative** +5
AC 19, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 14	**Perception** +6
Speed 5	

Standard Actions

Halberd (weapon) **✦ At-Will**

Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +8 vs. AC

Hit: 1d10 + 5 damage, and the town guard marks the target until the end of the town guard's next turn.

Crossbow (weapon) **✦ At-Will**

Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +8 vs. AC

Hit: 1d8 + 5 damage.

Powerful Strike (weapon) **✦ Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞

Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +8 vs. AC

Hit: 2d10 + 5 damage, and the target falls prone.

Triggered Actions

Interceding Strike (weapon) **✦ At-Will**

Trigger: An enemy marked by the town guard makes an attack that doesn't include it as a target.

Attack (Immediate Interrupt): Melee 2 (triggering enemy); +8 vs. AC

Hit: 1d10 + 5 damage.

Skills Streetwise +7

Str 16 (+4)	**Dex** 14 (+3)	**Wis** 11 (+1)
Con 15 (+3)	**Int** 10 (+1)	**Cha** 12 (+2)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common

Equipment chainmail, halberd, crossbow, 20 bolts

Red Pipe	Single-Use Terrain

This pipe runs across the chamber before turning 90 degrees.

Standard Action

Requirement: You must be adjacent to the pipe if you use the Thievery skill.

Check: Thievery check (hard DC) to breach the pipe; otherwise deal 10 damage to a square of the pipe in a single attack to breach it (all defenses 10).

Success: The pipe bursts.

Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in the blast); +7 vs. Fortitude

Hit: 1d8 + 4 poison damage, and the target is blinded (save ends).

7 Orc Savages (S)	Level 4 Minion Brute
Medium natural humanoid	XP 44 each
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	**Initiative** +3
AC 16, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 12	**Perception** +1
Speed 6	Low-light vision

Standard Actions

Handaxe (weapon) **✦ At-Will**

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC

Hit: 8 damage, or 12 with a charge attack.

Handaxe (weapon) **✦ At-Will**

Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +9 vs. AC

Hit: 6 damage.

Triggered Actions

Savage Demise

Trigger: The orc drops to 0 hit points.

Effect (Free Action): The orc takes a standard action.

Str 16 (+5)	**Dex** 13 (+3)	**Wis** 9 (+1)
Con 13 (+3)	**Int** 8 (+1)	**Cha** 8 (+1)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Giant

Equipment hide armor, 4 handaxes

Treasure: The adventurers find a common level 6 item on one of the guards.

Tactics: The savages charge into battle without regard for their safety, trusting in *savage demise* to leave a mark. The guards strike from behind a screen of minions whenever possible, enacting retribution against enemies that attack the orcs. The rust monster focuses on the character equipped with the most impressive metal weapon or armor, and it attempts to consume the item. It avoids adventurers without metal equipment, since they do not interest it in the least.

Event 9: Down the Tubes

Combat Encounter Level 5 (1,000 XP)

The oversized pipe is the adventurers' highway, taking them right into the aboleth's territory.

Perception DC 21: The adventurer spots the grells hidden among the debris.

Light: None.

Monsters: 4 grell stranglers (G), 3 scurrying rat swarms.

The pipe you are traveling through is more than thirty feet in diameter and littered with heaps of decaying refuse. A shallow stream of sewage trickles along the lowest point of the curved surface. Suddenly, a pack of aberrant horrors that look like floating brains with razor beaks and lashing tentacles burst from the piled offal and attack.

Heroes who did not succeed on the Perception check to notice the grells are surprised.

The rat swarms are not present initially and should not be placed on the map. They burst from the feeder pipes at the start of round 3.

Refuse Piles: Squares filled with refuse are difficult terrain.

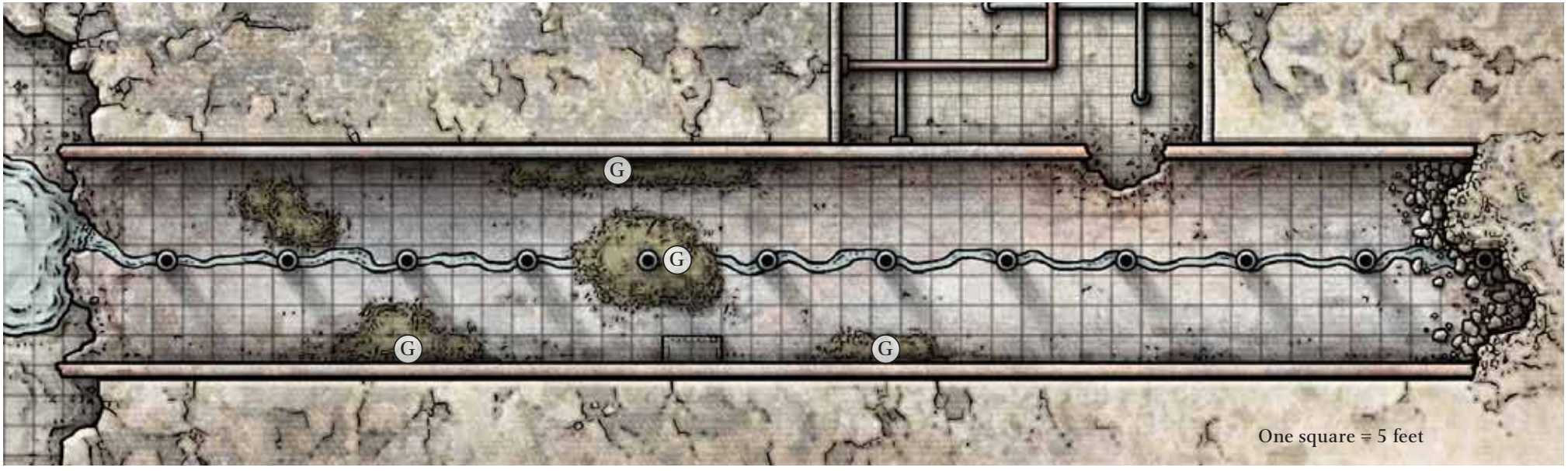
Tubular Arena: The concave nature of the battlefield makes moving along the steeply sloped outer edges difficult. The northernmost and southernmost squares of the map require a DC 14 Acrobatics check to move into or along. Failure ends the creature's action immediately; on a failure by 5 or more, the creature falls prone and slides 2 squares toward the center of the pipe.

Platform: This iron platform on the southern wall, a relic from when the pipe was installed, is 15 feet above the lowest point of the pipe and can be reached by using a ladder set into the wall (no check to climb, but doing so takes 1 additional square of movement).

Feeder Pipes: These smaller pipes running down the center of the large pipe rise vertically from the floor to a height of 4 feet and are 18 inches in diameter. Other pipes descend from the ceiling. The pipes provide cover and take 1 additional square of movement to scramble over.

Treasure: The adventurers find 270 gp and a polished piece of jade (worth 100 gp) in a rusty iron box wedged in the refuse.

Tactics: The grells are hungry and act accordingly, attempting to grab a tasty-looking enemy and drag it to a safe spot for a quick snack. The rat swarms have similar motivations but go about their task much more directly by swarming over and devouring whichever adventurer is closest.



3 Scurrying Rat Swarms	Level 1 Skirmisher
Medium natural beast (swarm)	XP 100 each
HP 27; **Bloodied** 13	**Initiative** +5
AC 15, **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 11	**Perception** +4
Speed 6, climb 2	Low-light vision
Resist half damage from melee and ranged attacks; **Vulnerable** 5 to close and area attacks	
Traits	
☼ **Swarm Attack** ✦ **Aura** 1	
Any enemy that ends its turn in the aura takes 4 damage, and the swarm can slide it 1 square as a free action.	
Swarm	
The swarm can occupy the same space as another creature, and an enemy can enter its space, which is difficult terrain. The swarm cannot be pulled, pushed, or slid by melee or ranged attacks. It can squeeze through any opening that is large enough for at least one of the creatures it comprises.	
Standard Actions	
⨭ **Swarm of Teeth** ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +6 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d10 + 3 damage, or 1d10 + 8 if the swarm moved at least 2 squares during this turn.	
Effect: The swarm can shift 1 square.	
Str 12 (+1) **Dex** 16 (+3) **Wis** 9 (-1)	
Con 11 (+0) **Int** 1 (-5) **Cha** 7 (-2)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	

4 Grell Stranglers (G)	Level 4 Skirmisher
Medium aberrant magical beast (blind)	XP 175 each
HP 55; **Bloodied** 27	**Initiative** +7
AC 18, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 14	**Perception** +8
Speed 1 (clumsy), fly 6 (hover)	Blindsight 12
Traits	
Combat Advantage	
The grell deals 1d6 extra damage against any creature granting combat advantage to it.	
Standard Actions	
⨭ **Tentacle Lash** (poison) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +9 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d6 + 7 damage, and the target grants combat advantage until the end of the grell's next turn.	
⨭ **Grasping Tentacles** ✦ **Recharge** when the grell has no creature grabbed	
Effect: The grell can shift 1 square before the attack.	
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +7 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 1d6 + 4 damage, and the target is grabbed (escape DC 16). The grell can shift 1 square and then pull the target up to 2 squares. Until the grab ends, the target takes ongoing 5 damage and cannot make opportunity attacks.	
Move Actions	
Haul Away ✦ **At-Will**	
Requirement: The grell must have a Medium or smaller creature grabbed.	
Effect: The grell shifts up to half its speed, pulling the grabbed creature to a square adjacent to it.	
Skills Stealth +10	
Str 18 (+6) **Dex** 17 (+5) **Wis** 12 (+3)	
Con 15 (+4) **Int** 11 (+2) **Cha** 8 (+1)	
Alignment evil **Languages** Deep Speech	

Event 10: The Crawlers' Lair

Combat Encounter Level 5 (1,175 XP)

The pipe empties into a natural cavern inhabited by a handful of carrion crawlers.

Light: None.

Monsters: 4 carrion crawler scuttlers (C), 3 plaguechanged grunts (P).

The pipe you have been following ends abruptly in a shattered edge of rusting iron perched ten feet above the floor of a natural cavern. The cavern's only notable feature is a shallow pool on the side nearest you fed by the pipe's trickling stream.

Four hideous wormlike aberrations scuttle about the chamber, tentacles flailing, while a trio of plaguechanged monstrosities gibber and moan quietly to themselves.

Shattered Pipe: The edge of the pipe is 10 feet above the ground. A creature can lower itself over the edge and drop safely into the pool as a move action, but getting back into the pipe from the ground requires a DC 14 Athletics check to grab hold and pull oneself up.

Shallow Pool: The filthy water of the pool is only a few feet deep and is difficult terrain.

Treasure: The adventurers find an uncommon level 5 item in the pool.

Tactics: The plaguechanged grunts hurl themselves into the fight, uncaring about the continuation of their torturous existence. The carrion crawlers prefer to strike from a distance before retreating to safety, though once a crawler has a stunned adventurer in tow, the others converge on it to ravage the hapless victim.

4 Carrion Crawler Scuttlers (C) **Level 5 Skirmisher**
Large aberrant beast XP 200 each

HP 63; **Bloodied** 31 **Initiative** +5
AC 19, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 17 **Perception** +3
Speed 8, climb 8 (spider climb) Darkvision

Standard Actions

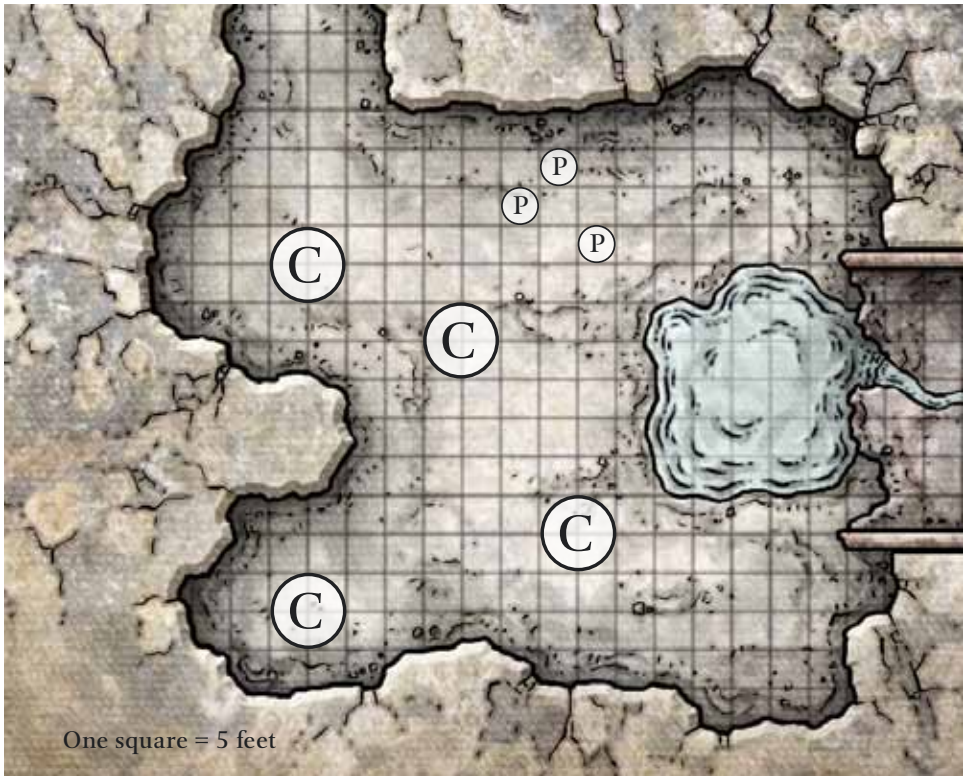
⊕ **Bite** ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 4 damage, or 3d8 + 4 against a stunned target.

⸸ **Tentacles** ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +8 vs. Fortitude, or +10 vs. Fortitude against a prone target
Hit: The target is stunned (save ends). The carrion crawler shifts up to its speed, pulling the target with it.

Move Actions

⸸ **Unsettling Scuttle** ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The carrion crawler shifts up to its speed. It can move through enemy spaces and climb during the shift. Each time the carrion crawler enters an enemy space for the first time during this movement, it makes the following attack against that enemy.
Attack: Melee 0; +8 vs. Reflex
Hit: The target falls prone.

Str 18 (+6) **Dex** 13 (+3) **Wis** 12 (+3)
Con 15 (+4) **Int** 2 (-2) **Cha** 14 (+4)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –



3 Plaguechanged Grunts (P) **Level 2 Brute**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 125 each

HP 43; **Bloodied** 21 **Initiative** +0
AC 14, **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 12, **Will** 12 **Perception** +0
Speed 6

Standard Actions

⊕ **Slam** ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. AC
Hit: 1d12 + 6 damage, or 1d12 + 12 against a grabbed target.

⸸ **Burning Grasp** (fire) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +5 vs. Reflex
Hit: 10 fire damage, and the grunt grabs the target (escape DC 12) if it does not have a creature grabbed.

Triggered Actions

Plaguechanged Resilience ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The grunt is reduced to 0 hit points, but not by a critical hit.
Effect (No Action): Roll a d20. On a 15 or higher, each creature adjacent to the grunt takes 5 fire damage, and the grunt is instead reduced to 1 hit point.

Str 16 (+4) **Dex** 8 (+0) **Wis** 8 (+0)
Con 13 (+2) **Int** 6 (-1) **Cha** 10 (+1)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

Event 11: Noxious Nothics

Combat Encounter Level 5 (1,175 XP)

Only a capering band of nothics and their plague-changed playthings stand between the heroes and their final goal.

Light: Dim (the blueflame crevice).

Monsters: 2 nothic plaguegazers (P), 2 nothic mindwarps (M), 3 plaguechanged grunts (G).

The narrow tunnel opens into a cavern as large as the one you just left. Flickering blue light plays upon the walls, and the shadows thrown there dance slightly out of synch with bodies that cast them. Four of the scrabbling, one-eyed aberrations caper madly around the chamber, whirling discordantly to the "music" provided by the moans of three plaguechanged creatures and the crunches and pops of their constantly warping forms.

A DC 14 Arcana or Dungeoneering check reveals that the flickering blue fire emanating from the crevice is a manifestation of raw Spellplague energy.

Stalagmites: The thickest stalagmites have merged with the ceiling to form pillars of solid rock, and they are blocking terrain. The smaller examples grant cover and are difficult terrain.

Blueflame Crevice: The crevice is only an inch or two wide, but the dancing flames that periodically erupt from it make crossing it dangerous. A creature that enters a square of the crevice or starts its turn in one takes 5 fire damage.

Twisted Space: The presence of so much Spellplague energy has amplified the deteriorating effect the nothics have on normal reality, rendering the concept of space somewhat fuzzy. Adventurers can teleport up to their speed as a move action, but anyone who does so must immediately make a saving throw or increase his or her whispering madness by 1 stage. The adventurers are aware of this option instinctively.

The monsters in this area can also take advantage of the twisted space, teleporting just as the characters can but without needing to make the saving throw.

Treasure: One of the plaguechanged has a tarnished silver necklace set with a moonstone (worth 250 gp).

Tactics: The plaguechanged charge into melee at the earliest opportunity, looking only to cause as much damage as possible before they are put out of their misery. The nothic plaguegazers attempt to slow or immobilize melee combatants so that those adventurers are easier to avoid while setting up *spread the infection*. The nothics jump from target to target, staying with a particular target until it saves against *warping gaze*.

2 Nothic Mindwarps (M)	**Level 3 Lurker**
Medium aberrant humanoid	XP 150 each
HP 42; **Bloodied** 21	**Initiative** +8
AC 17, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 13	**Perception** +2
Speed 6	Darkvision, truesight 10
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⊕ **Claw** ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d6 + 4 damage.	
Warping Gaze (illusion, psychic) ✦ **Recharge** when an enemy saves against this power	
Attack: Ranged 5 (one enemy); +6 vs. Will	
Hit: 2d6 + 4 psychic damage, and the target grants combat advantage (save ends). Until the target saves against this effect, the nothic is invisible to every enemy but the target, and its *claw* deals 1d6 extra damage to the target.	
Miss: The nothic has partial concealment until the end of its next turn.	
Forbidding Glare (fear, psychic) ✦ **Encounter**	
Attack: Close burst 2 (enemies in the burst); +6 vs. Will	
Hit: 1d8 + 4 psychic damage, and the nothic pushes the target up to 2 squares.	
Miss: Half damage, and the nothic can push the target 1 square.	
Skills Stealth +9	
Str 16 (+4) **Dex** 16 (+4) **Wis** 12 (+2)	
Con 18 (+5) **Int** 8 (+0) **Cha** 9 (+0)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Deep Speech	

2 Nothic Plaguegazers (P) **Level 6 Artillery**
Medium aberrant humanoid XP 250 each

HP 60; **Bloodied** 30 **Initiative** +7
AC 20, **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 16 **Perception** +5
Speed 6 Darkvision, truesight 10

Traits

Oozing Plague (poison)
Any creature that ends its turn adjacent to the nothic takes ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

Standard Actions

⊕ **Claw** ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 8 damage.

Sickening Gaze (necrotic, poison) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +11 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 1d6 + 3 necrotic damage, and the target is slowed and takes ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends both).
First Failed Saving Throw: The target is immobilized instead of slowed.

Spread the Infection (necrotic, poison) ✦ **Recharge** when first bloodied
Attack: Area burst 1 centered on a creature taking ongoing poison damage within 10 (creatures in the burst); +11 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 1d6 + 3 necrotic damage, and ongoing 10 poison damage (save ends).
Miss: Half damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

Skills Stealth +12
Str 15 (+5) **Dex** 18 (+7) **Wis** 14 (+5)
Con 18 (+7) **Int** 10 (+3) **Cha** 9 (+2)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Deep Speech

3 Plaguechanged Grunts (G) **Level 2 Brute**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 125 each

HP 43; **Bloodied** 21 **Initiative** +0
AC 14, **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 12, **Will** 12 **Perception** +0
Speed 6

Standard Actions

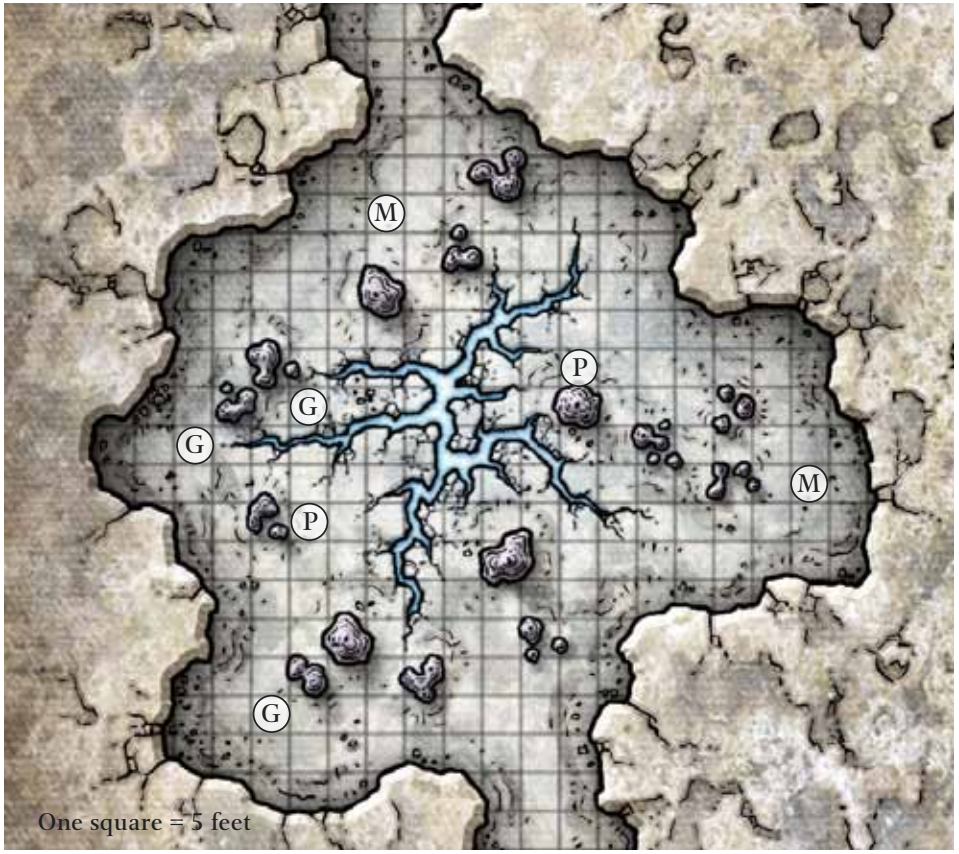
⊕ **Slam** ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. AC
Hit: 1d12 + 6 damage, or 1d12 + 12 against a grabbed target.

Burning Grasp (fire) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +5 vs. Reflex
Hit: 10 fire damage, and the grunt grabs the target (escape DC 12) if it does not have a creature grabbed.

Triggered Actions

Plaguechanged Resilience ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The grunt is reduced to 0 hit points, but not by a critical hit.
Effect (No Action): Roll a d20. On a 15 or higher, each creature adjacent to the grunt takes 5 fire damage, and the grunt is instead reduced to 1 hit point.

Str 16 (+4) **Dex** 8 (+0) **Wis** 8 (+0)
Con 13 (+2) **Int** 6 (-1) **Cha** 10 (+1)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –



Event 12: The Lord of Madness

Combat Encounter Level 6 (1,350 XP)

The adventurers finally reach the aboleth mastermind behind the murders in the city.

Light: Bright (the blueflame surge).

Monsters: 1 aboleth plaguewhisper (A), 6 plaguechanged wretches (W).

The floor of the cavern ahead is a latticework of cracks and crevices from which sizzling blue flames rise. A heavily scarred aboleth, its form bearing the marks of the Spellplague's warping effects, hovers over the center of the chamber, visibly crackling with the power that has scarred it. A number of plaguechanged creatures form a rough circle around the aboleth, screaming and thrashing about in agony as their master channels siphoned Spellplague energy through them.

A DC 14 Arcana or Dungeoneering check identifies the fiery floor as a much more unstable version of what the adventurers encountered in Event 11, caused by even closer proximity to the Spellplague's unstable power.

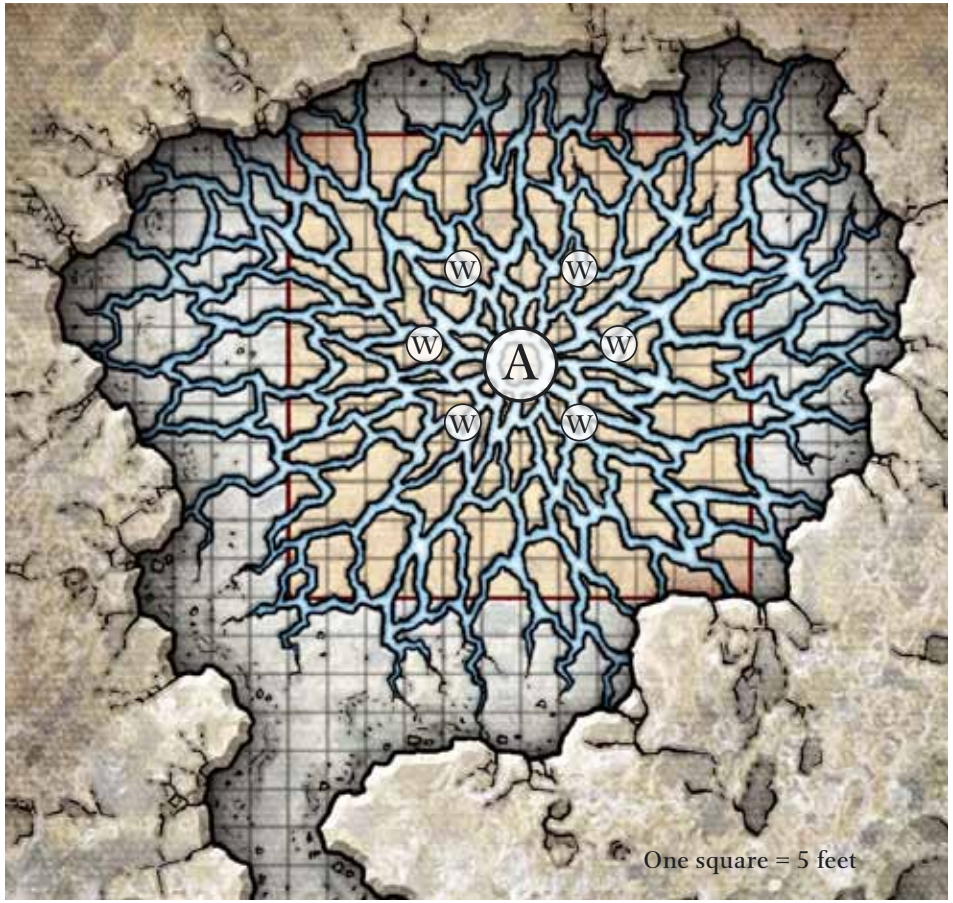
Erupting Blueflame: At the end of every other round, starting with round 2, roll a d12 twice. The first roll indicates which column of squares is affected, and the second roll indicates the row. The squares in the indicated column and row are filled with an eruption of blueflame that lasts until the next rolls are made for this purpose. A creature that enters a square of erupting blueflame or starts its turn in one takes 5 fire damage. The fiery discharge provides partial concealment.

Flame Charged: The overwhelming amount of Spellplague energy coursing through this cavern offers spectacular destructive power to those willing to pay its price. A character can (as a free action) choose to deal 1d10 extra fire damage with all of his or her attacks made before the end of the character's turn, but must immediately make a saving throw or increase his or her whispering madness by 1 stage. The adventurers are instinctively aware of this option.

Treasure: None.

Tactics: The plaguechanged fight with insane fury but little tactical awareness, and they swarm forward en masse. The aboleth moves to keep as many enemies in its aura as possible while pummeling the adventurers with its psychic might and turning them against one another. It is unafraid of damage or death and does not hesitate to provoke opportunity attacks if the situation demands it, especially while it benefits from *blue fire cascade*. Indeed, one of the aboleth's opening moves is to fly into the midst of the adventurers, use *blue fire cascade*, and then spend an action point to use *mental barrage* to provoke opportunity attacks.

Both the aboleth and the plaguechanged are more than willing to charge through squares of erupting blueflame (see above) to reach a target. The aboleth intentionally bathes in the fires as often as needed to ensure that it constantly benefits from *feast of flame*.



Aboleth Plaguewhisper (A) Level 7 Elite Controller
Large aberrant magical beast (aquatic) XP 600

HP 166; **Bloodied** 83 **Initiative** +4
AC 21, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 20 **Perception** +4
Speed 5, fly 7, swim 10 Darkvision
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Traits

☼ **Whispers of Insanity** (psychic) ✦ **Aura** 5
The aura is difficult terrain for enemies. An enemy that ends its turn in the aura must make a basic attack against its nearest ally as a free action or take 5 psychic damage.

Feast of Flame
Whenever the aboleth takes fire damage, it gains a +4 power bonus to damage rolls until the end of its next turn.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Flailing Tentacle** ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +12 vs. AC
Hit: 3d6 + 5 damage.
Effect: The aboleth can slide the target 1 square.

Double Attack ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The aboleth uses *flailing tentacle* twice.

Mental Barrage (psychic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one or two creatures); +10 vs. Will
Hit: 2d6 + 2 psychic damage, and the target is dazed until the end of its next turn.

Blue Fire Cascade (fire) ✦ **Recharge** when first bloodied
Attack: Close burst 2 (creatures in the burst); +10 vs. Reflex
Hit: 3d6 + 7 fire damage.
Effect: Any creature that makes an attack against the aboleth before the end of the aboleth's next turn takes 5 fire damage.

Minor Actions

Ensnare Mind (charm) ✦ **Recharge** when no creature is dominated by this power
Attack: Ranged 10 (one dazed creature); +10 vs. Will
Hit: The target is dominated (save ends).

Skills Arcana +11, Dungeoneering +9
Str 17 (+6) **Dex** 12 (+4) **Wis** 12 (+4)
Con 19 (+7) **Int** 17 (+6) **Cha** 18 (+7)
Alignment evil **Languages** Deep Speech, telepathy 20

6 Plaguechanged Wretches (W) Level 2 Controller
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 125 each

HP 37; **Bloodied** 18 **Initiative** +4
AC 16, **Fortitude** 12, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 12 **Perception** +1
Speed 6

Standard Actions

⊕ **Coldfire Claw** (cold, fire) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 5 fire and cold damage, and the target is slowed (save ends).

Triggered Actions

Blue Fire Burst (fire, force) ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The wretch becomes bloodied.
Attack (Immediate Reaction): Close burst 2 (creatures in the burst); +5 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d8 + 2 fire and force damage, and the wretch pushes the target up to 2 squares.
Miss: Half damage.

Str 12 (+2) **Dex** 17 (+4) **Wis** 11 (+1)
Con 13 (+2) **Int** 6 (-1) **Cha** 10 (+1)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

Aftermath

With the aboleth slain, the immediate threat to Neverwinter is ended. The effects of the whispering madness end the instant the aboleth dies. Upon learning of the return of the adventurers, Telliann is eager to hear the details of their exploits and give them the agreed-upon reward.

The pressing danger might be past, but recent events raise disturbing new questions and open the door for all manner of future exploits. Learning more about the source of the Spellplague energy they encountered in the depths or poking around the Chasm for more aboleth activity could lead the adventurers into conflict with the Abolethic Sovereignty and their minions. The aboleths' influence extends throughout Neverwinter and beyond, and although the aboleth encountered in this adventure was not important to the Abolethic Sovereignty's plans, the heroes have proven they are a threat. The aboleths might use their influence over Soman Galt, Neverwinter's mayor, to bribe the heroes into accepting new quests designed to lead them to their doom.

About the Author

Daniel Marthaler is a writer, primarily for D&D Insider, whose credits include the adventures *Sunderpeak Temple*, *Lord of the White Field*, *Legacy of Io*, and *Evard's Shadow*.

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Fort Bones

By Keith Baker

Illustration by Adam Paquette

"It is time for us to embrace peace. Let us sheathe our swords and let our dead finally rest."

–King Kaius ir'Wynarn III, addressing the Thronehold Assembly

Fort Bones lies far from the heart of Karrnath. No lightning rail leads to this bleak citadel, and roads shattered by war have yet to be repaired. The bones of fallen enemies are fused to its walls, and skeletal warriors keep silent vigil on the ramparts. As a show of good faith and dedication to peace, Kaius III withdrew most of Karrnath's undead legions and sealed them in the vaults below the city of Atur. Only a few elite units remain in the service of the crown, scattered across the nation. Fort Bones is one of the only places where the dead outnumber the living. Here bone knights and blackguards lead fleshless cavalry against Valenar raiders, while the Corpse Collectors pioneer new forms of necromancy in preparation for wars to come.

Kaina's Folly

The Blood of Vol has had a presence in Karrnath for centuries, and followers of this faith (known as the Seekers of the Divinity Within) served under Karrn the Conqueror and Galifar I. The Seekers believe that life is a struggle against death. Undeath isn't the goal, but a Seeker takes pride in the fact that he can defend his country and his family until his bones are ground to dust. Because of this association with the undead, temples of the Blood of Vol are often built in manifest zones linked to Mabar or Dolurrh. The Seekers have learned to harness the power of the Shadowfell and to protect their comrades from its dangers.

The citadel now known as Fort Bones was once the seat of Gyrnar Shult, a priest of the Blood of Vol and the reeve of the agricultural region of Odakyr. The warlord Kaina ir'Durna claimed Gyrnar's keep at the start of the Last War, fortifying it to serve as a garrison in the Cyran offensive. This act proved to be a disaster. A devoted follower of Dol Arrah, ir'Durna dismissed Gyrnar's warnings about the power of Mabar and the importance of his rites. Then, when

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Mabar entered an unexpected coterminous phase, its dark power flowed out of the keep and leached the life from the land. Across Odakyr, crops failed and livestock withered. This event was just one among those that led to the first crippling famine, but it was one that could have been prevented.

When Kaius I embraced the aid of the Blood of Vol, Gyrnar returned as commander of the newly fortified keep. He rechristened it Fort Bones, swearing that the bones of every Karrn that had fallen would serve as a wall to protect those still alive. It would be decades before actual bones would be incorporated into the walls, but Gyrnar devoted himself to improving the military applications of necromancy. The region was suffused with the power of Mabar, and some of the greatest priests and necromancers of the age joined Gyrnar at his keep. The high priest Malevenor—then a living thing—remained with Gyrnar for nearly three weeks. Together they perfected the Odakyr Rites, the ritual that produces the infamous Karrnathi undead. While Atur became the primary seat for the production of undead, the power of the Mabar manifest zone ensured that Fort Bones remained a vital center for the development of undead and the training of bone knights.

Fort Bones weathered many sieges without falling, and no one expected the outright devastation that accompanied the Long Night in 990 YK. The finest druids and wizards of the Valenar joined together for the attack, shattering the fort's walls with earthquakes and storms. By the time relief arrived from Fort Zombie, the fortress had been obliterated. The new commander swore to rebuild the walls with the bones of her enemies, and this was no idle threat. Bones of humans and elves are embedded into the pale stone and mortar of the restored fortress, and they moan softly when enemies approach.

Fort Bones Today

Even within Karrnath, many people despise the role that the undead played in the war. Kaius I was forced to use undead soldiers out of desperation, but many of the warlords believe that his decision was a stain on Karrnath's proud martial history—that Rekkenmark's finest could have found a way to overcome the odds. Beyond this, heavy reliance on undead greatly increased the influence of the Blood of Vol across Karrnath, something that concerned Kaius III and Regent Moranna. The decision to seal the legions below Atur and to cease the mass production of undead in the City of Night was a vital move to strengthen Kaius's position both within and beyond Karrnath's borders. However, Kaius isn't willing to let this power go. Fort Bones is far from Atur and the public eye. The fortress serves as a vital watchtower against Valenar incursion, but it is also the primary research facility for the Corpse Collectors, the royal necromancers of Karrnath.

Alinda Dorn is the Captain of Bones, the military commander of Fort Bones. She is never seen without her mystical bone armor, and some say it is fused to her flesh. For the past eight years she has devoted herself to the destruction of the Valenar, and she is one of the foremost experts on their strategies and tactics. Her undead cavalry can't match the Valenar horses for sheer speed, but her steeds never tire. She has learned that force alone isn't enough to match the Valenar, and she is an expert in games of cat and mouse; she is also a master of the game Conqueror and loves to play it with newcomers.

The commander of the Corpse Collectors is known only as the Kind, a title given to him by Gyrnar Shult long ago. The Kind is an old man with long gray hair who wears the simple black uniform and silver raven pin of the Collectors. He remains vigorous despite his age, but he never raises his voice or shows any sign of anger. He isn't especially skilled at combat magic, but he is one of the finest necromantic ritualists of the modern age.

The Captain of Bones and the Kind are both followers of the Blood of Vol, as are many of their soldiers. However, they are devoutly loyal to their king and to Karrnath. Alinda despises the Emerald Claw with the same fervor as the Valenar, believing its adherents to be traitors that besmirch the name of the faith. She is deeply suspicious of Malevenor and the Crimson Covenant of Atur. Along with the Kind, she believes that Fort Bones provides a vital opportunity to prove the loyalty of the Seekers and to place their unique skills in the service of the crown.

Fort Bones is primarily garrisoned by Karrnathi skeletons. As the stronghold of the Corpse Collectors, it serves as a training facility for the next generation of bone knights, necromancers, shadowbinders, and other such specialist forces. Combined with the need for skilled troops to battle the Valenar, this results in an unusual concentration of elite individuals. Any Karrnathi veteran is welcome in the fortress, though Alinda Dorn will want to know reasons for a traveler's presence and keeps a close eye on anyone who could be an agent of the Emerald Claw. The Corpse Collectors do their work in vaults deep below the main fortress, and this dungeon complex is highly secured; only visitors with proof of official business are allowed into these vaults.

The Wasted Land

Odakyr never recovered from the wasting and the war. The burned-out husks of plantations and farms are scattered across a vast sward of gray, brittle grasses and dry soil. Though it isn't as dangerous as the Mournland, this region is saturated with the energy of Mabar, which has a number of effects.

- The maximum number of healing surges possessed by a living creature is reduced by two (to a minimum of one).

- Any roll to forage in this region takes a –5 penalty.
- Within five miles of Fort Bones, all radiant attacks are weakened.

Undead cavalry are a specialty of the fortress, and mounted skeletons roam the region on endless patrols. The Kind also employs skeletal ravens that fly on wasted wings, along with bone beacons that warn of the approach of living beings; given the threat of the Valenar, the fortress is always searching for new forms of protection. There are many necromantic traps laid for the Valenar, from necrotic glyphs to ghoulish wildlife; it's a dangerous place for the unwary.

WHAT ARE KARRNATHI UNDEAD?

The Karrnathi undead are tremendously efficient solders. A normal zombie requires some sort of necromancer to sustain and command it, but the sentient Karrnathi undead can integrate with any unit. Fear, hunger, and exhaustion are alien to them. They can see in perfect darkness—an advantage over the warforged, and one that Karrnath often exploited in conflicts with Cyre. One of the few limitations of the undead derives from their utter lack of mercy or compassion. Left on its own, a Karrnathi skeleton will slaughter all opposing forces—soldiers, civilians, even children. A commander must exercise close control if he wants his undead to leave anyone alive.

The Odakyr Rites—the ritual used to create the Karrnathi undead—isn't a cheap form of Raise Dead. The original victim is gone. A Karrnathi skeleton doesn't have the specific memories of the warrior who donated his bones. The military specialty of the undead reflects that of the fallen soldier, so only the bones of a bowman can produce a skeletal archer. However, the precise techniques of the skeleton aren't those of the living soldiers. Rekkenmark doesn't teach the bone dance or the twin scimitar style common to the skeletal swordsmen. So where, then, do these styles come from?

Gyrnar Shult believed that the Karrnathi undead were animated by the martial spirit of Karrnath itself. This is why they can be produced only from the corpses of elite Karrnathi soldiers: an enemy corpse lacks the connection to Karrnath, while a fallen farmer has no bond to war. However, the Kind fears that the undead aren't animated by the soul of Karrnath, but rather by an aspect of Mabar itself—that the combat styles of the undead might be those of the dark angels of Mabar. Over the years, he has felt a certain malevolence in his skeletal creations that he can't explain, not to mention their love of slaughter. He has also considered the possibility that they are touched by the spirits of the Qabalrin ancestors of Lady Vol. The Kind hasn't found any proof for these theories, but they haunt his dreams.

Karrnathi undead never show emotion and never speak without cause. A Karrnathi skeleton is content to stand motionless and silent for days if there is no reason to move. A soldier's name is typically a combination of name and number—"Aleph 12"—and the records of the original identity of the body are hidden in the tomes of the Corpse Collectors.

The distinctive armor of the Karrnathi skeletons is forged for them and fitted to their fleshless bones. Fort Bones operates a small forge for this purpose, though most of this armor is created at the Night Forge of Atur.

Adventure Hooks

Fort Bones is a point of light surrounded by wasteland. It is home to elite forces. Karrnathi characters who use the shadow power source or who have connections to the Blood of Vol might have trained at the fort or served there during the Last War; perhaps a player character blackguard was one of the few survivors of the Valenar raid of 990 YK. The Captain of Bones truly hates the Order of the Emerald Claw, and so Fort Bones could be a useful haven for adventurers who are engaged in a long-term conflict with the Emerald Claw or the Crimson Covenant. Consider the following hooks.

- The Kind believes that hostile agents are hidden among the Karrnathi undead—darker spirits that have infiltrated the bones for an unknown purpose. He calls on one of his favored students to root out the impostors. Is the character up to the task?
- The Order of the Emerald Claw wants access to the Mabar manifest zone and the rituals developed by the Kind. When agents of the Emerald Claw seize control of the fort, it's up to the characters to defeat them.
- The characters are staying at the fort when all of the undead fall dormant. What's going on? Is this the first sign of a new Valenar offensive?
- During the Last War, a group of Karrnathi soldiers hid a Cyran treasure in one of the old plantations. Adventurers find a map to the trove, but they must evade skeletal patrols and a group of Cyran avengers who are also trying to recover the relic.
- Kaius III believes that the Kind or others among the Corpse Collectors are plotting against the crown. The adventurers are sent undercover. Can they determine the truth and survive the experience?

- The Corpse Collectors are developing new styles of necromancy in the depths. Adventurers working for any other nation, or for the Church of the Silver Flame, could be sent to discover what lies below the fort and sabotage or steal their work.
- An adventurer learns that it's possible to recover the soul of someone trapped as a Karrnathi undead. Can the character identify the bones of his father and release him from his eternal service?
- The Kind calls a student to Fort Bones and sends him to Xen'drik to search for information on the Qabalrin necromancers. If the Karrnathi undead are tied to this darkness, this could prove a dangerous discovery.
- The Valenar stole the bones of Gyrnar Shult when they pillaged the fortress in 990 YK. The Kind is determined to recover the bones in order to raise Gyrnar as a lich. Can the adventurers track down the scattered bones?

About the Author

Keith Baker is the creator of the Eberron® campaign setting, the designer of the Gloom card game, and a frequent lecturer at Morgrave University in Sharn. Though he doesn't endorse grave robbing or the necromantic arts, he has great respect and admiration for the Karrnathi people. While researching this article, he was afforded the rare opportunity to ride a Karrnathi skeletal horse. Suffice it to say that the experience didn't end well.

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Ecology of the Banderhobb

By Steve Townshend

Illustrations by Howard Lyon and Jim Nelson

At sunset, fissures of shadow crack the surface of the fading day, lengthening until night shatters its bonds and floods the mortal realm in darkness. As the shadows expand, hideous monsters with bulging eyes, sharkish maws, and quick, long-fingered claws press close and peer through from the land of death and darkness. When the night is full, they escape, pouring forth from the Shadowfell to devour their victims whole or drag them away to nightmare lands.

Forbidden Lore

Little is known of banderhobbs, for the wise do not speak of them. They boil from the shadows into the benighted world, and wherever they appear people vanish, never to be seen again. Then the monsters too are gone, like shadows evaporating before the dawn or the fading remnants of nightmare.

Fools scoff at the notion of truths too dangerous to tell, dismissing rumors of banderhobbs as children's tales or superstitious nonsense. Those who talk too much inevitably disappear, though, leaving behind only silence. Yet sometimes threads of truth survive, woven into the fanciful fabric of stories passed on in the bright light of day, far from shadow. Such speculative accounts are all that exist concerning these elusive marauders from the Shadowfell.

Alternative and Add-On Mechanics

This article presents a handful of alternative rules mechanics to illustrate the monster's story elements. Think of them as a banderhobb theme: abilities you can add to or swap with those presented in the *Monster Manual*® *3* banderhobb stat blocks. You might instead "kitbash" a monster with these new abilities, using them to build a vastly different kind of banderhobb or an original shadow creature. Each new element's entry includes suggestions for its use. See the banderhobb shadow raider at the end of this article for an example of a customized banderhobb.

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The Watcher from the Shadows: Banderhobb Psychology

"Without word,
Seldom heard,
Banderhobbs creep
From shadows deep
In voiceless night
When stars alight
Upon the bleak and moonless blight."

Communication and Language

People believe that every question has an answer, every riddle a solution; they seek justification for the events in the world around them. But those who encounter banderhobbs abandon such naive. The monsters neither suggest nor give any explanation for why they emerge from the deep shadows to snatch up and devour friends and loved ones. They make no threats; no shouts of challenge or triumph precede their raids or follow them back to the dark. Only questions remain in their wake, for the banderhobbs are utterly silent.

A banderhobb's enormous mouth is not capable of creating speech. Its long, ropelike tongue cannot form hard consonants against double rows of saw-like teeth. The creatures nevertheless innately understand the Goblin tongue, and many banderhobbs can comprehend Common as well. This depth of understanding far surpasses the ability to follow simple orders and commands, extending even to a sense for idiomatic speech and metaphors in different dialects. Some banderhobbs respond to one culture's regional form of speech and others to that of a different culture.

Before he vanished without a trace, Arlen Thaft—the traumatized sole survivor of a banderhobb raid—described what he took to be the creatures' "conversation."

"They stared like toads . . . blankly gazing past one another, eyes fixed upon nothing at all. Then, sudden as silence, they moved on all at once, back into the shadows and away into the no-place whence they came."

Though banderhobbs are not known to have telepathic abilities, they are uncannily aware of one another's actions. During raids, they can predict the intentions of their quarry with accuracy, outmaneuvering a clever attack strategy or moving from shadow to shadow to cut off the prey's escape. The *uncanny awareness* power reflects this preternatural coordination.

Triggered Actions

Uncanny Awareness ✦ Encounter

Trigger: An enemy willingly leaves a square within 5 squares of the banderhobb.

Effect (Immediate Reaction): The banderhobb moves up to its speed.

Banderhobbs should be frightening threats in combat as well as in the adventure's story. Tactically, you might use *uncanny awareness* after moving a banderhobb adjacent to either a bloodied character or one who relies on ranged attacks.

Emotion

The Shadowfell is a realm of hidden horrors, where the dark deeds of twisted villains shape the lives and outlook of the plane's mortal inhabitants. Some of the Shadowfell's wickedest beings are driven by malice; others by pride, jealousy, revenge, or insatiable hunger. But such urges are as foreign as compassion, companionship, or love to the banderhobbs. They dwell among the innumerable terrors of the Shadowfell in perfect apathy. Harming a banderhobb cannot make it angry; insurmountable odds cannot frighten it away. Even when its master perishes, a banderhobb feels no sorrow but simply awaits the command of a replacement.

It is said that in bloody feeding pits, banderhobbs dine on captives that no longer suit their dark masters' whims. Here, the monsters indifferently tear their screaming, still-living meals limb from limb with all the deliberateness of a funeral procession.

THE MECHANICS OF APATHY

The banderhobbs presented in *Monster Manual 3* do not include mechanics that reflect their emotionless nature. You can decide to make this apathy a story effect, portraying their actions accordingly, or it can have some bearing on their combat statistics.

If you decide that banderhobbs were once people (see "Where No Songs Go: Banderhobb Origins" below), you might rule that magical effects that influence emotion still have some sway over them. On the other hand, you can choose to cast them as apathetic juggernauts that shrug off any attempt to reach their hearts and minds. In that case, give your banderhobbs the following qualities.

Immune fear
Resist 10 psychic

Intelligence

A banderhobb's thoughts begin and end with its mission. Under the command of some ambitious villain or inscrutable dark lord from the Shadowfell, the monster exists only to serve, and it resorts to any means to accomplish an assigned task. No matter the peril, it relentlessly presses through obstacles with no care for itself. Mute and lumbering, banderhobbs

stand against ranks of veteran soldiers, wade through blazing infernos, or infiltrate forbidden demesnes warded with death-dealing magical traps and guardians.

Though entirely subservient, banderhobbs are far from mindless drudges—to the regret of would-be heroes who underestimate them. Behind the empty gaze of its huge, alien eyes, a banderhobb's mind is undistracted by stray impulses or desires. With agile, wicked cunning, a banderhobb swiftly evaluates its tactical situation, changing its approach as needed to gain or keep the advantage. It retreats when circumstances turn against it, then moves through shadow to strike unnoticed from a better position, or vanishes into the darkness after accomplishing its objective. The *tactical shadow jump* power represents these changing methods.

Triggered Actions

Tactical Shadow Jump (teleportation) ✦ **Encounter**

Trigger: The banderhobb is hit or missed by an enemy that has combat advantage against it.

Effect (Immediate Interrupt): The banderhobb teleports up to 10 squares. If it then has cover or concealment from any enemy, it becomes invisible to that enemy until the end of the banderhobb's next turn.

You can use *tactical shadow jump* to make a banderhobb into a lurker that strikes from hiding. This power also presents an opportunity to turn a combat encounter into a chase, since banderhobbs that have abducted their quarry seldom have cause to stay and fight. The banderhobb can make a fast exit once the adventurers start bearing down on it; then they will have to pursue it to rescue the imperiled victim.

Organization

By ones and twos, banderhobbs march on flapping feet through tears in the fabric of the Shadowfell to pull off raids on the world. They usually do so by traversing places through which none but shadow creatures can pass (see "Senses and Shadow Fissures," below), maintaining an orderly formation to move efficiently through the thinnest shadows. Once they have completed their mission, the monsters file back in like manner; those with living cargo in their bellies or carrying the mission's objective go first, while the remaining ranks deal with any pursuit.

Traits

Shadow Squeeze

While squeezing through a space 1 square smaller than itself in dim light or darkness, the banderhobb can move at full speed rather than half speed, it doesn't take the –5 penalty to attack rolls, and it doesn't grant combat advantage for squeezing.

Shadow squeeze is useful only in appropriate terrain. If you decide to add this trait to your banderhobbs, make sure the battlefield has plenty of 1-square-wide doorways and short, narrow passages. Since most banderhobbs are Large, the adventurers will most likely attempt to exploit such terrain. Then your banderhobbs can use *shadow squeeze* to turn the adventurers' plans against them, hemming them into their own trap.

The Raid: Banderhobb Physiology

"Their tongues ensnare
The unaware,
Their clutching claws
Crush bones like straws;
They bolt their prey
And stoop away
Before the dawning break of day."

Senses and Shadow Fissures

Most creatures must journey down long and lonely roads to find a shadow crossing between the world and the Shadowfell. Due to its unique senses, however, a banderhobb can discover and traverse such routes anywhere that darkness prevails.

Every shadow in the world touches the Shadowfell in some way, if only faintly. Through receptors in their skin and their bulbous eyes, banderhobbs acutely sense the places where such shadows stretch into their native realm, then seek them out. There they lie in wait until the shadows grow deep enough to grant passage to the other side.

Although some shadow crossings are as large as a cemetery or a battlefield, most places where shadows touch the Shadowfell are smaller rifts that spider their way across the boundaries between planes. Through them, banderhobbs catch the scent of their quarry. They eavesdrop on mortals' conversations and press against the shadow fissures, peering into the world to survey the ideal place to strike when night descends. Sometimes vague traces of their horrific forms can be distinguished even in daytime shadows: glaring eyes and hungry mouths pushing at the surface, or a long-fingered claw crawling through to seize a victim.

Shadow Fissure

You can use this terrain element to mark weak spots between planes on the battlefield. It appears wherever shadows are cast (such as at the base of a stationary object or creature). Shadow creatures such as banderhobbs can see and travel through these openings when the shadows are deepest.

Effect: At the start of the encounter, mark the squares that contain shadow fissures and decide if each one is in dim light or in darkness. Each of these squares corresponds to one in the Shadowfell.

Dim Light: A shadow creature in a dimly lit shadow fissure square on the Shadowfell side can see as if it were in the associated square in the world and can make melee basic attacks as if it were in that square.

Darkness: In addition to the above traits, when a shadow fissure square is in darkness, a shadow creature in a square on either side can use a move action to cross to the other side, ending the move in the corresponding square.

Claws

Even in the daytime, when shadow fissures are tenuous, banderhobbs' claws are treacherous. A step too close, and the monster reaches through to drag its prey down into the waiting dark. Later, when the shadow fissure has diminished or vanished, no sign remains of the victim's fate.

The creature that a banderhobb seizes is unlikely to escape the monster's ruthless grasp. With a single clawed hand, the banderhobb can easily pin a blacksmith's arms or squeeze the strength out of the doughtiest warrior's body. The *bone-crushing claw* power reflects this powerful grip.

Standard Actions

Bone-Crushing Claw ✦ At-Will

Requirement: The banderhobb must not be already grabbing a creature with this power.
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); level + 5 vs. AC
Hit: The banderhobb grabs the target (escape DC moderate of the banderhobb's level). Until the grab ends, the target takes ongoing 5 damage.
Aftereffect: The target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends).

You can use *bone-crushing claw* to add a soldier role to a banderhobb for pinning down a threatening character. When narrating its effects, you can enhance the horror of the situation by describing how the monster's grip gradually crushes a person, threatening to mangle the body.

Tongue

During the day, creatures in the world are beyond the reach of banderhobbs' claws in the Shadowfell. Instead, the creatures send their tongues snaking through tiny shadow fissures to capture small prey.

As big as a great python and ten times as strong, the banderhobb's ghoulish tongue is controlled by dozens of thick muscles. It strikes faster than a coiled serpent to ensnare its quarry, then pulls the entangled creature inexorably toward the toothy maw. With this sort of mastery over its terrible tongue, a banderhobb can manipulate its prey like a sinister puppeteer. The *tongue snare* power describes this ability.

Minor Actions

Tongue Snare ✦ At-Will (1/round)

Requirement: The banderhobb must not be already grabbing a creature with this power.
Attack: Melee 3 (one creature); level + 3 vs. Reflex
Hit: The banderhobb grabs the target (escape DC moderate of the banderhobb's level). Once per turn as a free action, the banderhobb can pull the grabbed target up to 3 squares.

Tongue snare is a good choice for giving a banderhobb the controller role, though it also works as a soldier power.

Mouth, Gullet, and Stomach

In his memoir, famous braggart and adventurer Tallen Tenswords claimed that he escaped the belly of a banderhobb that came for him after he stole the *Seventh Secret of Shadow* from Knightsbarrow Citadel. Strangely, the account contains little of the posturing and braggadocio that Tallen exhibits in the rest of the text. Of the experience, he wrote:

"I had nearly escaped Knightsbarrow entirely when the thing pulled me back down the black tunnel toward the brink of its terrible maw. Its tongue had me firmly around the ankle, and I held only my dagger and lantern. In the flickering light its mouth was the entrance to a jagged cavern, opening upon some unfathomable abyss. Ever wider it grew, all the while drawing me nearer and nearer unto the breach. I braced my feet upon its jaws and we struggled for a moment, but no mortal strength could contest its irresistible pull. My knees buckled, and down I went, past its double row of shark's teeth, into its open gullet, down inside the thing's body. The muscles of its throat constricted, forcing me along and threatening to suffocate me and break my bones. The ordeal ended when at last I passed beyond its gullet; I dropped several feet, but came to land on the thing's soft stomach floor.

Every part of me ached. I was battered and bruised, but remarkably I remained in one piece. My lantern lay nearby,

its flame guttering but no less alive than myself. I crawled over to retrieve it and, opening all its shutters, I gazed around me in a full circle.

The thing's stomach was like a vast room, roughly fifteen feet across and at least as high. All around me lay the detritus of past victims—broken tools, rotten clothing, coins, the bones of humans and animals. This place could not truly exist within the creature, for it was far wider than the thing and twice as tall, with enough space to carry several persons easily within. And yet this was not the strangest thing I saw, nor the most terrible.

In tales of my adventures I have been called a liar by some, a braggart by most. But upon my life and my mother's name, this I swear is true: Etched across a wide section of the stomach's wall, I saw a human face.

Imagine an ordinary face stretched across half the length and width of that broad surface, its features elongated and distorted. The marks that outlined this face were a ghostly white in color, contrasting with the magenta of the stomach lining. It had no eyes, for it was no true face but only the phantom impression of one. In the place its mouth should have occupied, a valve-like hole dilated and contracted with the movement of the thing's muscles, and from this orifice issued a noisome stench.

I concluded that the space I now occupied was a holding stomach of sorts, that the "mouth" valve must lead to the place where the creature digested its meals. There seemed but one way out.

Dagger in hand, I went to work upon the orifice. All the while the blank, distorted face gazed sightlessly down upon me like a ghastly reflection of my own, as if to say, "Strip the soul away, and this flesh is all you are. No more than this."

Another stab, and the mouth opened as wide as it might go. Then I was devoured a second time, drawn inside a stinking maze of intestines, and eventually into a second stomach considerably more cramped than my prior accommodations. I carved my way out and emerged from the thing's true belly, the obscene monster a gory cocoon around my ankles.

However, I have never been capable of enjoying my victory. For whenever I reflect upon the encounter, I recall the horrible face stretched thin across the wall of its voluminous stomach. Even in its distortion, the ghostly visage bore human characteristics: lines of laughter, scars from pain, the full breadth of experience bleached and stretched into nonbeing.

And though I cannot say why, a voiceless thought deep within my soul whispers that a different face lies within each of these monsters, each one a horrid reminder of the fate that awaits us at the end. At the end of the dark road where no songs are sung."

The tale of Tallen Tenswords drew to a close the following year. He was last seen resting in his home the day before his disappearance.

His memoir was never completed.

Traits

Extradimensional Stomach (teleportation)

Whenever the banderhobb swallows a creature, the banderhobb gains 10 temporary hit points and teleports up to 5 squares.

If you give your banderhobb the *extradimensional stomach* trait, you can allow a swallowed character who has been removed from play to use his or her turn to search the inside of the creature. If the character can see, describe the space's dimensions and the stretched and distorted face much as Tallen Tenswords experienced it. Likewise, making close or melee attacks against the banderhobb's stomach results in the character carving a way out.

Being removed from play can be tough on players since they're missing the action, so give them the opportunity to contribute to the adventure or discover something special. A character swallowed by a banderhobb can use a standard action to search its extradimensional stomach, perhaps finding something of value. Consider placing an important plot item or treasure there—perhaps even a nonplayer

character, or a minor monster such as a minion or a scavenger.

The following list offers some suggestions for what a banderhobb's stomach might contain. You can roll a d10 to randomly generate a result or choose one as dictated by the needs of your campaign.

Roll	Treasure
1	Weapon
2	Treasure appropriate to the party's level
3	Humanoid creature
4	Nonhumanoid creature
5	Infected matter (carries a disease)
6	Junk
7	Corpses, bones
8	Clothing or armor
9	Artisan's tools
10	Intact notes, messages, maps, or books

Physical Differentiation

Sages have observed a similarity between the divergent traits of banderhobbs and the most notable features of the goblin races. Like goblins, banderhobbs come in various shapes and sizes. For example, the vicious banderhobb filch (*Monster Manual* 3, page 19) is small and lithe, whereas most of its kin are stout and tall. Though the filch shares the physical strength of its larger kin, it lacks their specialized mouths and stomachs; instead of swallowing its victims, it stuffs them in an enormous sack.

When customizing your own banderhobbs, let your imagination run wild. Experiment. Fear knows no shape or size; the essence of this monster is a bogeyman that comes in the night to steal people away for dark, unknown purposes. The physical aspects of such a creature can be as varied and disturbing as you like.

Where No Songs Go: Banderhobb Origins

No one knows
Where banderhobb goes;
Leaving no trace
Of the place no-place–
Just a trackless trail
Where shadows prevail
Beyond the ever-darkened veil.

To Sleep, Perchance to Vanish

Banderhobbs wait for their quarry to sleep before they emerge from places of deepest darkness: the back of a closet, beneath a bed, inside an unlit cellar. They pluck nobles from fortified castles through darkened dungeons, abduct families from city homes where tall buildings cast long shadows, and raid sleepy rural communities to leave behind lonely ghost towns. Young and old, rich or poor, the banderhobbs snatch them all away.

No one knows where the monsters come from or to what dark destination they return. All witnesses invariably vanish in a day, a month, or a year. The banderhobbs take their secrets along with their prey, leaving only vague rumors of a nameless dread.

Though few reliable accounts of banderhobb origins exist, folk tales abound. Some say the creatures were the first goblins, or the elite soldiers of the goblin lord Maglubiyet. Many archfey hold that banderhobbs are the shadowborn cousins of the malicious, dimension-folding boggles that inhabit the Feywild. Certain powerful entities dwelling in the Astral Sea claim that only nineteen banderhobbs exist, the first and last of an elder race more ancient than either good or evil.

Mortal parents tell their children that if they refuse to behave, the banderhobbs will come to take them away. Such scolding seems harmless enough, having been passed down from generation to generation to frighten children into obedience. Until people begin to vanish.

Travelers from the Shadowfell speak of a place beyond the Stormy Sea where a dark tower stands upon a black rock, inhabited by an ancient entity of the endless malevolent night. It lies at the end of the road where no songs go, where nightmares on the wing pass beyond the Shadowfell and into the Plane of Dreams. This realm cannot be named, for it exists neither here nor there, nor even in between; but by the Vistani it is called *no-place*, and no truer words could describe it.

Tales claim that the banderhobbs' victims become slaves, toiling at some unfathomable labor until their souls are gradually worn away and they transform into banderhobbs. Others whisper of prisoners hurled into feeding pits caked with gore, where crowds of banderhobbs await their next meal.

If *no-place* exists, no god watches over it, good or evil—only the abominable power that commands the banderhobbs. Perhaps the act of telling stories creates their reality in *no-place*—each whispered tale a block in the foundation of the dark tower.

Perhaps the banderhobbs build it themselves.

Banderhobb Shadow Raider

The shadow raider is an example of a customized banderhobb that is suitable for heroic tier play. It uses some of the optional traits and powers described in this article.

Banderhobb Shadow Raider **Level 10 Controller**
Large shadow magical beast XP 500

HP 106; **Bloodied** 53 **Initiative** +10
AC 24, **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 24, **Will** 20 **Perception** +8
Speed 6, swim 6 Darkvision
Immune fear; **Resist** 10 psychic

Traits

Shadow Squeeze
While squeezing through a space 1 square smaller than itself in dim light or darkness, the banderhobb can move at full speed rather than half speed, it doesn't take the -5 penalty to attack rolls, and it doesn't grant combat advantage for squeezing.

Standard Actions

Bite ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +15 vs. AC
Hit: 2d12 + 5 damage.

Bone-Crushing Claw ✦ At-Will
Requirement: The banderhobb must not be already grabbing a creature with this power.
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +15 vs. AC
Hit: The banderhobb grabs the target (escape DC 18). Until the grab ends, the target takes ongoing 5 damage.
Aftereffect: The target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends).

Swallow ✦ Recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature grabbed by the banderhobb); +13 vs. Fortitude
Hit: The target is removed from play. Until the effect ends, the target takes ongoing 10 damage. The target can take actions as normal and can make melee and close attacks against the banderhobb. The effect ends when the banderhobb drops to 0 hit points or when the banderhobb ends the effect as a free action. When the effect ends, the target appears in an unoccupied space of its choice adjacent to the banderhobb.

Minor Actions

Tongue Snare ✦ At-Will (1/round)
Requirement: The banderhobb must not be already grabbing a creature with this power.
Attack: Melee 3 (one creature); +13 vs. Reflex
Hit: The banderhobb grabs the target (escape DC 18). Once per turn as a free action, the banderhobb can pull the grabbed target up to 3 squares.

Triggered Actions

Uncanny Awareness ✦ Encounter
Trigger: An enemy willingly leaves a square within 5 squares of the banderhobb.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The banderhobb moves up to its speed.

Skills Athletics +15, Stealth +15
Str 21 (+10) **Dex** 20 (+10) **Wis** 16 (+8)
Con 18 (+9) **Int** 15 (+7) **Cha** 7 (+3)
Alignment evil **Languages** understands Common and Goblin

About the Author

Steve Townshend is a fiction writer and freelance D&D designer whose recent credits include *Demonomicon*™, *Monster Manual*® 3, and *Madness at Gardmore Abbey*™. The banderhobbs and Oublivae, Demon Queen of Desolation, are two of his favorite D&D creations.

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FORGOTTEN REALMS

ED GREENWOOD'S
Eye on the Realms

Spellslayer Wine

By Ed Greenwood

Illustration by Hector Ortiz

Rumors in Waterdeep, Baldur's Gate, Athkatla, Westgate, Cormyr, and Sembia tell of a new discovery: a weapon—finally!—that common folk can use against those who use magic to oppress others.

It has become known as spellslayer wine, though that's not the name given to it by its creator.

No two tales agree about who the creator of this wine is or where he is now, though most assert that it's a human male who is in hiding somewhere in the Heartlands of Faerûn. Nor do accounts agree on the ingredients of this potion, though they describe it as a thick-flowing, clear syrup that deadens the ability to cast spells for a time.

And it works! Wizards have been slain by their own servants after this substance was slipped in their food or drink. Haughty and cruel mages have been humbled by rulers who have feared them for years. Newly helpless spellcasters have been arrested for their past crimes while ensconced in what was once a formerly unassailable tower, temple, or other magically defended sanctuary.

The Stopper of Spells

Spellslayer wine is any sort of wine into which has been mixed a small amount of the magic-deadening concoction known as spellstop. Obviously, the effects of this secret substance survive being dissolved in alcohol (and most cooking, too). One enterprising caravan merchant who resells the concoction hit upon the idea of diluting it and making it more alluring to buyers at one stroke.He combined it with wine already in his wagons and then sold it as spellslayer wine. Other resellers have put it into sweets or soft fruit crated with wet cloth wrappings to keep the fruit from withering before it can be sold.

Unfortunately for the purchaser, the dilution of the substance makes it uncertain how quickly the spellstop concoction can cause a particular individual to lose his or her ability to use magic, and the duration of this disability also is uncertain.

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Pure, undiluted spellstop takes effect in 1d4 rounds, and its effects last for 2d4 hours; diluted doses might not affect a consumer for 6 minutes or more, and the duration of the effect is 4d4 minutes. The concentration of spellslayer wine most readily available takes effect in 2d4 rounds, and it affects a victim for 1d4 hours.

Someone affected by spellslayer wine loses the ability to use arcane powers for the duration of the effect. Expended powers can be replenished during a rest, as normal.

PERTINENT TERMS

These days in the Realms, alchemists, herbalists, and healers use the term "tincture" to mean a liquid, stabilized distillation in solution of a single ingredient (such as tincture of thistle, which commoners call thistle juice) meant to be taken orally or as an ingredient in a physic.

A philter is a stabilized liquid or syrup mixture of ingredients meant to be taken orally. Merchants might give these substances many fanciful names, but they are the equivalent of real-world early American patent medicines.

A physic is a concoction mixed by someone who is treating another person. The substance is meant to be ingested, or it can be applied to a wound or a part of the body directly or as a poultice. Such a mixture might include philters, tinctures, raw substances (such as straw or grass that might be handy), and food or drink.

For centuries, Faerûnian alchemists and herbalists have known that successful drugs, of the liquid or syrup sort sold as philters, often result from correctly combining the right plant materials with the blood of certain monsters, often magical beasts. Dragonblood is the legendary peerless ingredient.

Janesse Makes a Discovery

Spellstop was created—or discovered, if one prefers that term—not by a male hiding in the Heartlands, but by a woman living in the city of Daerlun: a herbalist named Janesse Wyndsur.

At one point, Janesse was searching for new and better painkillers through mixing different combinations of herbs with the bloods of various magical beasts. She tested it on a local wizard who was wracked by horrible pains due to the internal gases caused by lurruth, a rare disease that is spread from a monster's bite and that causes rotting from within. Janesse came up with a mixture that lessened her client's pain, but left him unable to cast spells for a short time. He could go through the motions of spellcasting, but nothing would happen. He was temporarily cut off from using his gift for the Art. He could still understand and prepare spells and use magic items, but whenever he tried to work a spell, nothing happened.

In her explanation to the wizard, Janesse passed this off as the effect of a bad dose, and she went on trying other things to ease his pain. Eventually she found something that purged the lurruth from him. In secret, however, she experimented with variations on this spellstop mixture, eventually settling on the most effective one. As far as the wider Realms has determined, she started covertly selling spellstop about three summers ago, adopting a disguise (and later, fearing capture, intermediaries) to make trailside deals with passing caravan merchants.

Creating Spellstop

Three natural herbs, two powdered and one whole-leaf (that is, an intact leaf is put into the mixture, and it's not "done" until the leaf has dissolved) are simmered in a mixture of one part water, one part common oak sap, two parts wyvern blood, and one part harpy blood. Janesse believes that peryton blood might work even better, but thus far she hasn't procured any.

The powdered herbs are alarvaun and drace.

Alarvaun is the small, waxy green leaf of the wild vaundyr vine, which grows in profusion in shaded wet areas in Calimshan, Tethyr, Amn, and the Dragon Coast. Drace is the leaf of the bittergar bush, a small, dark blue thistlelike shrub found almost everywhere except in mountains or deserts. It is inedible to most creatures due to its extreme bitterness, but when powdered and cooked it isn't bitter at all. It intensifies other flavors with which it's combined.

"A goodly pinch" of each is used in Janesse's recipe; too much or too little results in a yellow, translucent syrup that doesn't affect spellcasting at all.

The whole-leaf ingredient of spellstop is thelmallow. Thelmallow flowers grow as floating blossoms in stagnant swamp and bog waters. The large, ragged white flowers have no known use except as the homes of hundreds of tiny, swarming swamp insects called stingflies. The plant's halo of surrounding green leaves consist of two or three staggered layers of large, broad, and waxy leaves. Thelmallow is recognized even when it isn't in flower by its four or more parallel furrows (and the raised ribs between them) that run the length of each leaf.

The mixture begins as a purple-brown watery liquid. As it simmers, it gives off a sharp scent that in Janesse's words "tingles the nose like crushed mint leaves, but hath not mint's coolness." In about an hour, the thelmallow leaf dissolves, and the liquid transforms into a clear, thick syrup that is, as Janesse describes, "as if clean stream water has set into a pudding."

An Art, Not a Science

Janesse conducted experiments using intermediaries and discovered that the duration of any dose of spellslayer wine is not in the least bit predictable. Not only does the length of its effect vary widely from individual to individual, but when carefully measured, identical doses are ingested by the same individual on different occasions, the duration of each effect can vary just as widely. All of which means that the precise way that spellstop functions within the body and the brain remains as mysterious as the inner workings of physiology are to most Faerûnians.

The Market

Spellslayer wine has become incredibly rare and valuable, with prices sometimes soaring to as much as 20,000 gp per undiluted dose, from buyers who are willing to pay anything to be rid of this or that magically powerful oppressor.

Code words have sprung up, spurred by fears of spell surveillance, so a prospective buyer might mutter, "I'm looking to help someone to sing," or "I'm looking to buy something for someone whose thirst is great," rather than actually mentioning "spellslayer wine."

More than one hunt has been launched to try to capture (and in some cases, slay) the wine's producer. Most of these hunters are trying to trace the mysterious creator back through the chains of covert buying and selling; a few of them are now converging on the eastern Cormyr and western Sembia area.

Thus far, the wizards Esmer Barmoroun of Baldur's Gate and Susk Moryndrar of Chavyondat have been murdered after consuming spellslayer wine. The wandering outlaw mage Harhornsar took several bad wounds while under the effect of spellstop, and the band of brigands he led was reduced from sixty riders to a bare handful that fled with him back into the wild uplands of Gulthandor.

Further, spellstop might have been involved in the deaths of Deirorn of Selgaunt, Haskran of Procampur, Narth Laroun of Zazesspur, and Izntal of Calimport. In all of those cases, local authorities cited poison as the killing agent, but interestingly, someone in the government of Calimport has since hired no less than three separate bands of adventurers to find, procure, and bring back a producer or a persistent seller of spellslayer wine.

In the words of the legendary Alaundo, "Events unfold, and we watch with interest to see what befalls."

About the Author

Ed Greenwood is the man who unleashed the Forgotten Realms® setting on an unsuspecting world. He works in libraries, plus he writes fantasy, science fiction, horror, mystery, and romance stories (sometimes all in the same novel), but he is happiest when churning out Realmslore, Realmslore, and more Realmslore. He still has a few rooms in his house in which he has space left to pile up papers.

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The Five Deadly Shadows

An adventure for characters of 7th-9th level

By Teos Abadia

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Hiro Yun tightened the sash bearing his katana. "Benevolence, sincerity, courage, courtesy, honesty, honor, and loyalty," he said. "These are the reasons why I must defeat the Five Deadly Shadows."

The monk bowed deeply. "Magistrate-sama, forgive me," he said. "They are five, and you are one. What if you do not succeed?"

Hiro nodded. "Then I will have done my duty, and you shall pray that others come."

Adventure Synopsis

The town of Kudoku is in despair. Its magistrate (called a *daikan* in Kara-Tur) recently challenged the power of a group of assassins known as the Five Deadly Shadows, but died in the attempt. The Shadows represent the corruption of the virtues of Bushido, a code of conduct used by samurai warriors in feudal Japan. The seven virtues are used in

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this adventure to represent the principles that guide Kara-Tur society. Each event focuses on one virtue, allowing the players and their characters to gain an understanding of these societal principles. By mastering the seven virtues, the characters can more easily defeat the Five Deadly Shadows.

Location: The town of Kudoku is envisioned as part of the archipelago nation of Kozakura, but could also be part of the island nation of Wa or in a province of Shou Lung, such as Hungtse.

Note on Names: This adventure uses the Western convention for names, placing the given name before the family name, as in the case of Hiro Yun. The adventure also refers to individuals by their last names followed by the honorific "sama" for someone who is deserving of respect or is a cultural superior (Yun-sama). If a character lacks a family name or is culturally equal or inferior to the speaker, his or her first name is used (Jushiro).

Extended Rests: This adventure is expected to be completed in one game day, without an extended rest. The adventurers sense that a great evil is gathering and that delaying action would bring disaster to the town. If an extended rest becomes necessary, see "Adjusting the Challenge Level" below.

Adventure Background

Hard-working farmers and artisans brought prosperity to the town of Kudoku. That prosperity eventually attracted a criminal organization known as the Deadly Shadows. The Deadly Shadows slowly infiltrated the town, corrupting everything that had once been good. The monks of the temple fled, scrupulous merchants took their trade elsewhere, honorable provincial guards were corrupted or murdered, and eventually the town became a dark version of its former self.

Rumors of the corruption eventually reached the provincial governor, who dispatched the magistrate Hiro Yun. Hiro investigated the criminal activities, slowly shutting down the gang's activities and dispatching its members until just the five assassins who headed the Deadly Shadows remained. One month ago Hiro challenged them in combat, hoping to shame them and drive them from the town. One of the assassins saw the error of his ways and joined Hiro's side. Hiro and the repentant assassin fought bravely, but were defeated by the other four. The assassins then used dark magic to bind the souls of Hiro and the defeated assassin to this world, preventing them from joining their ancestors and taking their place in the great Celestial Wheel. The townspeople believe this evil act has doomed the town as well. They are correct; if heroes do not come soon, the town of Kudoku will sink deeper into ruin.

Involving the Heroes

Even though this adventure is set in Kara-Tur, the characters need not be from Kara-Tur. The characters might become involved in any number of ways. Consider tailoring the premise to character themes or backgrounds. For example, a monk character who experiences the dream vision (below) might see the bodies of dead monks strewn about the temple and seek to right a grievous wrong. A character who has a theme or background related to law or crime might know that the Deadly Shadows were led by five assassins who sought to corrupt the empire's social order.

Provincial Governor

Although she is preoccupied by many duties, the provincial governor (called *kokushu* in Kozakura) has realized she has ceased receiving reports from Hiro Yun. She assembles the characters, charging them with investigating his fate and aiding the town of Kudoku. She might choose characters from outside Kara-Tur because it is improbable that they would be agents of the Deadly Shadows.

Mercantile Involvement

A wealthy merchant in a large city is distressed to find that shipments of fine silk are no longer arriving from Kudoku. He hires the characters to investigate what has happened.

Dream Vision

One or more of the characters begin to have dreams in which Hiro Yun appears as a ghost. He walks through a ruined town with dark clouds overhead. Though he attempts to speak, he can produce no sound. Eventually he comes to a temple. A tattered banner bears the name of the town: Kudoku. He points at the banner and the dream ends. The dream will repeat on subsequent nights until the characters reach the town.

Arrival in Kudoku

When the characters approach Kudoku, for whatever reason, read:

You reach the outskirts of the town of Kudoku. Dry winds blow dust through abandoned fields of rice and rotting melons. The dirt road leading toward an arched gate is devoid of merchants, travelers, or guards—unusual for a town of this size.

In the town you find the buildings are also in disrepair. Streets have not been swept, gardens are untended, shops display spoiled goods, and the few people you see are walking about with their heads low and their gaze despondent. When you approach them, the townspeople move away from you fearfully, as if afraid you would strike them.

The townspeople are overcome by despair, and are either afraid the characters might be agents of the Deadly Shadows or unable to believe anyone will help them. After the heroes gain the residents' trust, the townspeople can share the following information:

- The town mourns the recent death of the honorable Magistrate Hiro Yun. Yun-sama tried to defeat the Deadly Shadows gang that plagued the town.
- Yun-sama made great progress, defeating most of the gang members and ending their criminal enterprises.
- Eventually just the gang's leadership remained: five deadly assassins. Yun-sama proclaimed he would bring them to justice. He failed in the attempt, however.
- It is said that the assassins used dark magic to capture part of Hiro Yun's soul, preventing him from joining his ancestors and the great Celestial Wheel. The townspeople believe this also dooms their town to a similar fate.
- The five assassins have not yet acted to consolidate their power in the wake of defeating Hiro Yun, but the citizens expect they will soon do so.
- Sujin Makoto is the new magistrate. He suffers from despair as well and does not seem to have the inner strength to confront the Five Deadly Shadows. No one blames him. If asked how Makoto-sama was appointed, the residents are not sure. Makoto-sama was a merchant, and no one questioned him when he took the office.

If asked for more details about the assassins, the townspeople refer the characters to the magistrate, afraid to share any further information. If pressed, they whisper that Namiko Li, a geisha and the matron of the tea house, openly admits to being one of the Deadly Shadows.

The Unworthy Magistrate

If the characters seek out Sujin Makoto for information, read:

The magistrate's office is located on the far side of a central plaza lined with empty shops. A gravel pathway weaves through a small, weed-filled garden toward the entrance to the building. Small statues of soldiers, some of them broken, lie toppled along the path. The door is open, and soft whimpering can be heard coming from within.

Makoto-sama, the former merchant who has become magistrate, slumps over a large desk of lacquered wood. He does his best to compose himself when the characters enter the room. The walls hold several scrolls with commendations, all of bearing Hiro Yun's name. Characters can learn the following:

- Makoto-sama is crestfallen, devastated by the events of the previous weeks, culminating in Hiro Yun's death a month ago.
- He can share the same information as the townspeople (see above).
- He took over as magistrate when Hiro Yun died, but readily admits he is unfit to perform his duties and apprehend those responsible for Hiro's murder. He asks the characters to please do so in his stead. He will not relinquish his position, however.
- He is pessimistic, believing the town is lost and that it will descend into darkness and madness.
- All of the town guards either were defeated or left the town in shame.
- Makoto-sama relates that the geisha Namiko Li has announced she was one of the killers. More than one resident became enraged, rushing into the tea house to seek vengeance. Their bodies were later dumped outside by servants. Makoto-sama can provide directions to the tea house (event 2).

Event 1: Honor, Part 1

Roleplaying Encounter

As the characters leave the town square headed toward the tea house, they encounter an old monk. This event is the first step toward accomplishing the virtue of honor.

After leaving the central plaza you walk down a desolate and dusty street. You come upon an old monk struggling with a tremendous bundle of dry sticks, attempting to bear the weight upon his back. The monk's orange robes are tattered and faded, his face deeply lined with wrinkles.

The monk, Jushiro, struggles to take the large bundle of firewood to the local (now abandoned) temple dedicated to ancestor worship. The temple is a few minutes away, but this an arduous task for him. If the characters offer help, he refuses at first, though it is plain to see he is just being polite.

Jushiro leads you through desolate streets to an abandoned temple so small that it is little more than a shrine. Carvings on the interior walls depict ancestors of the village ascending toward a great wheel in the sky, and emblems of the gods decorate the wheel. The monk asks you to place the firewood next to an unlit hearth.

If he is asked about the temple, Jushiro says that it was once a place where the townspeople celebrated their ancestors and venerated the gods. But since Yun-sama's death, the townspeople have stayed away. Jushiro nevertheless spends his time tending the temple for them.

Jushiro lights a small fire. Warmth radiates quickly through the room. The flickering light dances across the ceiling, making it seem as if the Celestial Wheel is slowly rotating. Jushiro opens a small closet, returning to your side with a bundle for each of you. "Once there were many monks who cared for this village. Will you please wear these robes and serve our town?" He reverently presents each of you with an old robe of faded orange silk. Characters printed on the left breast of each robe are faded to the point of being illegible.

Jushiro can provide the following information:

- Before Hiro Yun was defeated, Jushiro and other monks served at the monastery on the east side of town.
- The monks cared for this town, but the new head of the order disbanded the monks.
- Jushiro is the last monk remaining in town. He struggles to fulfill the tasks his new master asks of him, but it is not possible to do so alone.
- If asked, he can relate that the head of the order changed one month ago, when a cruel monk challenged and defeated his benevolent master.
- Jushiro no longer recalls the meaning of the faded characters on the robes. He knows they are important, but their knowledge has been lost since Hiro Yun's death. He nevertheless asks the characters to don the robes (which can be worn over armor).
- Jushiro has heard that Namiko Li is a cruel and strict woman, and for that reason he wants nothing to do with her.

The characters can now continue to the tea house (event 2) or head toward the monastery (event 3). If they invite Jushiro to accompany them, he does so, but he politely declines to enter the tea house with them. If they leave Jushiro to his own devices, the monk meets up with them again when they begin the climb to the monastery.

Event 2: Courtesy

Combat Encounter Level 9 (2,300 XP) or

Combat Encounter Level 8 (1,700 XP) and Skill Challenge Level 8 (700 XP)

Namiko Li is a powerful wu jen and one of the Deadly Shadows. Upon Hiro Yun's death she bound his spirit to this world, corrupting the virtues he followed in life. Those corrupted virtues now serve on the side of the Deadly Shadows, and only by following closely the virtues of Bushido can the heroes overcome this protection. Her dark rituals have also begun to transform her and her servants into oni.

In Li-sama's tea house, characters who perform a tea ceremony and show courtesy will find themselves at an advantage in the ensuing combat. In game terms, the tea ceremony is a modified skill challenge.

When the characters approach the tea house, read:

In stark contrast to the rest of the town, the tea house is a beautiful structure of gleaming black roof tiles, dark lacquered wooden walls, and translucent red shoji screen windows. Dark wooden doors are painted with the characters for "Everlasting Serenity Tea House." A score of beggars in rags are gathered near the doors, as if awaiting handouts.

Beggars are considered beneath contempt by citizens of Kozakura. However, characters who are courteous to them can learn the following:

- Li-sama is the head geisha of the tea house. She is known to be cruel, but one of her attendants gives the beggars old food scraps once a day. Since the monastery was shuttered, no one else has fed them.
- The beggars provide Namiko Li's staff with information. She is aware that strangers have come to town, for example.
- After Yun-sama was killed, several guards and townspeople came to confront Namiko Li, angrily demanding justice. In each case, she demanded they follow the rules of the tea house. They did not, so she killed them.
- It is said she is a powerful master of magic, known as a wu jen.

When the characters knock or otherwise announce themselves, read:
The great wooden doors swing open. A pretty attendant in an emerald green kimono smiles warmly. "Welcome to the Everlasting Serenity Tea House," she says. "My name is Zhang, geisha in service to Namiko Li. Please come inside as honored guests."

Zhang leads them to a small waiting room, ignoring any questions pertaining to Namiko or recent events. Here she presents the first challenge, providing them with simple white kimonos and asking them to place their weapons, implements, armor, and any other equipment on nearby display racks. She promises their belongings will be returned to them when the ceremony concludes. If the characters do not comply, she repeats her request, saying, "Please, it is expected that you show courtesy in a tea house. All guests must follow the rules."

If the characters ask, she directs them to a changing room. Otherwise, she smiles and watches quietly while they change.

When the characters have chosen a course of action, read:
Zhang leads you into an open room. The center is sunken, with woven tatami mats of various colors arranged in a pattern around a central blue tatami mat, on which rest cups and other implements for a tea ceremony. A hearth is located next to the central mat. Three other geishas bow from across the room, each wearing a white kimono intricately decorated with shimmering blue, red, and silver. In their arms they hold bowls of water. A shoji screen door slides silently open and a woman with a cruel but beautiful face glides into the room. Her kimono is a brilliant gold with black floral patterns, and her long, dark hair has been tied into an intricate bun and decorated with flowers. She holds a colorful fan in her hand.

"Welcome to the Everlasting Serenity Tea House, my guests," she says. "I am Namiko Li, and yes, I killed Hiro Yun.

"Surely you have questions. This is a tea house and you are my guests. I promise to answer for my crimes only after the conclusion of the tea ceremony. You do know how to perform a tea ceremony?"

Alter how Namiko Li speaks based on your players. If they are typically willing to engage in roleplaying and speak with the people and creatures they encounter, you might wish to have Namiko Li try to provoke them into a fight, with words such as "Hiro cried out in pain when he died . . . most dishonorable." You might allow Insight checks (DC 16) for the characters to realize that Namiko expects them to fight.

Proceed to the "Combat!" section below if the characters are unwilling to perform the tea ceremony.

Otherwise, the tea ceremony begins. If any character is not wearing a kimono, Namiko Li offers one last chance to follow protocol before beginning the ceremony.

Skill Challenge: Tea Ceremony

This skill challenge is resolved in stages as the ceremony progresses. Unlike a typical skill challenge, success or failure is determined by the ultimate outcome of each stage. For example, if some characters fail individual History checks during stage 2 of the ceremony but the party nevertheless completes the purification stage of the ceremony by making Insight checks, that stage is still considered a success.

If the characters earn four or more overall successes, they have successfully completed the tea ceremony, which provides them a substantial advantage in the ensuing combat.

Stage 1: Protocol. The first step was the characters removing their equipment and donning kimonos. One overall success is rewarded if each of the characters complied with Zhang's request to do so.

Stage 2: Purification. The geishas remain silent, clearly watching to see if the characters know what to do next. Each character can attempt a DC 16 History check or Insight check. On a successful check,

ADJUSTING THE CHALLENGE LEVEL

Each encounter in this adventure can play differently depending on whether the heroes pass the tests of virtue. The combat encounters should usually be a hard challenge if the adventurers fail the tests and a moderate to easy challenge if they succeed. But a successful party might find the challenge underwhelming, even if the players enjoy the roleplaying. And a party that fails the tests might find the challenge overwhelming. In these cases, you might wish to adjust the encounters:

If a party finds the combat to be too easy for enjoyment, add 1-2 extra foes of the lowest level to the encounter, regardless of success with virtues. You can also choose to improve the foes by increasing the damage die of their attacks by one size (for example, d4 becoming d6).

If the characters are becoming overwhelmed, give them hints as to the importance of the virtues. Consider having Jushiro approach them and asking them to join him in prayers. The party can receive a benefit of your choosing depending on the help it needs, anything from recharging magic items, regaining two surges and a daily power, or gaining an extended rest.

If a character dies, consider asking the player to make a monk and play Jushiro, or a foe turned ally (such as one of the geisha bushi—the stat block can be used until the player has time to create a new character).

a character realizes that he or she must wash hands and face with water from the bowls held by the geishas. One successful check grants the party an overall success in this stage. With a result of 22 or higher, the characters also know where to walk and sit (the next step).

Stage 3: Tatami Placement. The different colors of the tatami mats are significant. The characters must take a specific route to reach the center tatami mat, and must then kneel so as to allow space for their host. If the characters did not succeed on any History checks or Insight checks in stage 2, they can attempt DC 22 Perception checks to understand the pattern of mats and colors, noticing signs of wear or otherwise determining the path they must take. If the heroes correctly determine the route and kneel in place, they earn an overall success. Otherwise, one of the geishas scolds them and tells them their proper place.

Stage 4: Serving/Receiving Tea. Namiko turns to one character, chosen randomly. She pours tea into a large cup the guest must hold. After the tea has been poured, the guest and Namiko must exchange proper bows. After bowing, the guest rotates the cup, takes a sip, compliments Namiko, and passes the cup to the next guest. The process then repeats for each character. Each character must attempt two DC 16 checks, the first using either History or Insight to understand and perform the ceremony correctly, the second using either Diplomacy or Bluff to properly compliment the host. The party can earn up to two overall successes during this stage.

When each guest has sampled the tea, Namiko stokes the fire and pours a cup of tea for each guest to enjoy.

Stage 5: Polite Conversation. While enjoying the tea, Namiko asks the characters what they would like to discuss. This is entirely a roleplaying moment in which the characters must keep her entertained while making polite conversation. Any threats, suggestions she is dishonorable, or other rude behavior constitutes a failure. If the characters are polite and entertaining, award them an overall success.

Combat!

The combat plays out differently depending on the characters' actions.

If the characters decide to engage in combat before completing the tea ceremony, or if they do not complete the tea ceremony, read:

The moment you abandon the tea ceremony, the geishas howl with rage. Namiko Li yells, "Dishonorable thieves! You shall pay for your lack of courtesy!" Her hands move quickly as she begins to cast a spell. The geishas wearing red and silver robes begin to change before your eyes. Their skin becomes a sickly green and their faces become twisted and disfigured, resembling those of oni. The geishas wearing green and blue robes do not transform. However, their faces bear grim determination as they move forward. "Death to the dishonorable!"

If characters do not have their weapons and armor, they suddenly feel a spiritual connection to their equipment. Each character can spend a healing surge before combat to summon their armor and equipment. Each item appears already equipped.

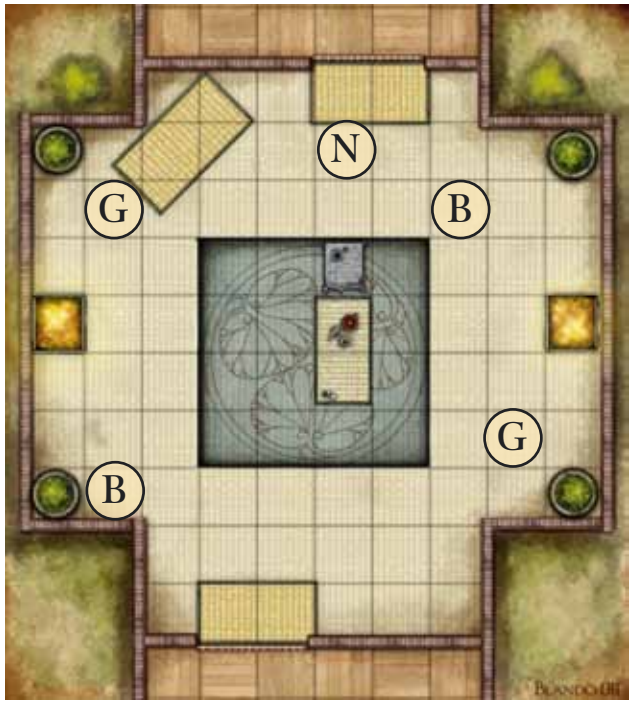
If the characters completed the tea ceremony, read:

The tea ceremony concludes, and the room is quiet. The geishas look at one another, confused. Then a flash of golden light blinds you. When vision returns you are wearing your armor, and again wield your weapons and other equipment. The four attendants bow to you. Namiko Li becomes furious. "What? Impossible! Though you may have passed my test I shall destroy you! Geishas, kill them. Kill them all!"

The geishas wearing red and silver robes begin to change before your eyes. Their skin becomes a sickly green and their faces become twisted and disfigured, resembling those of oni. The geishas wearing green and blue robes do not transform, however. They shake their heads sadly. "Li-sama, a thousand pardons," they say. "They have shown courtesy. You must answer for your crimes." They bow and begin to leave the room. Enraged, Namiko Li glares at you and begins to cast a spell.

Because of the characters' success, they do not spend a healing surge when retrieving their equipment, and the geisha bushi do not join the battle.

Light: The shoji screens allow bright sunlight to illuminate the room.



Namiko Li, Half-Oni Wu Jen (N) **Level 10 Elite Controller**
Medium shadow humanoid, giant XP 1,000

HP 204; **Bloodied** 102 **Initiative** +9
AC 24, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 22 **Perception** +8
Speed 6 Low-light vision
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Traits

Corrupting Serenity
At the start of her turn, Namiko can make a saving throw against one effect that a save can end. If she saves, the effect ends on Namiko, and she can transfer it to an enemy adjacent to her. If her saving throw fails, Namiko can still make a saving throw against the effect at the end of her turn.

Standard Actions

Oni's Touch (fire, necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. Reflex
Hit: 3d6 + 7 fire and necrotic damage.
Effect: Namiko can slide the target 1 square.

Beshadowed Mind (necrotic, psychic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 5 (one or two creatures); +13 vs. Will
Hit: 3d6 + 7 necrotic and psychic damage, and the target can't see more than 2 squares away from itself (save ends).

Wu Jen's Prophecy (charm) ✦ **Recharge** if the power misses
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +13 vs. Will
Hit: Namiko chooses one of her allies within 10 squares of her (the ally cannot be an elite or a solo). The target is weakened when attacking any enemy other than the chosen ally. This effect lasts until the end of the encounter or until the chosen ally drops to 0 hit points.

Deep Shadow (necrotic, zone) ✦ **Recharge** when first bloodied
Effect: Area burst 1 within 10. The burst creates a zone that lasts until the end of Namiko's next turn. The zone is difficult terrain for her enemies. Any enemy that enters the zone or ends its turn there takes 10 necrotic damage.
Sustain Minor: The zone persists until the end of Namiko's next turn, and Namiko can move the zone up to 4 squares.

Move Actions

Shadow Shield (teleportation) ✦ **Encounter**
Effect: Namiko teleports up to 3 squares and becomes insubstantial until the start of her next turn.

Triggered Actions

Shadow Augury ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: An attack hits Namiko while she is bloodied.
Effect (Immediate Interrupt): Shadow shield recharges, and Namiko uses it.

Skills Arcana +15, Religion +15
Str 12 (+6) **Dex** 18 (+9) **Wis** 17 (+8)
Con 14 (+7) **Int** 21 (+10) **Cha** 18 (+9)
Alignment evil **Languages** Common, Giant

2 Half-Oni Geishas (G) **Level 8 Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid XP 350 each

HP 92; **Bloodied** 46 **Initiative** +8
AC 22, **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 20 **Perception** +7
Speed 7 Low-light vision

Standard Actions

Flying Daggers (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 or Ranged 5 (one creature); +13 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 6 damage.

Twin Blossom Strike ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The geisha shifts up to her speed and uses *flying daggers* once at any point during the movement. If the attack bloodies the target, the geisha uses *flying daggers* a second time against the same target as a free action.

Triggered Actions

Oni's Anger ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The geisha drops to 0 hit points.
Effect (No Action): The geisha takes a standard action.

Skills Acrobatics +11, Bluff +10, Insight +12
Str 17 (+7) **Dex** 14 (+6) **Wis** 17 (+7)
Con 20 (+9) **Int** 15 (+6) **Cha** 13 (+5)
Alignment evil **Languages** Common, Giant
Equipment kimono, 12 daggers

Monsters: Namiko Li (N), 2 half-oni geishas (G), 2 geisha bushi (B) (not present if tea ceremony was completed).

Tactics: Namiko opens with *wu jen's prophecy* on a striker. She uses *deep shadow* defensively, using *oni's touch* to move characters into the zone. If a ranged combatant is particularly effective, Namiko uses *beshadowed mind*.

The half-oni geishas use *twin blossom strike*, seeking advantageous positions or ending adjacent to a character marked by a bushi. They focus fire until a target is bloodied, then let allies finish off that target.

The geisha bushi, if present, open with *shuriken to the gut* to immobilize melee characters. In subsequent rounds they use *wakizashi* to mark characters who are bloody or attacking Namiko, hoping to use *stand, you coward*.

Treasure: The character for Rei (Courtesy) appears on the heroes' robes, no longer faded.

When the creatures have been defeated, the characters can proceed to the monastery (event 3). If event 3 has already been completed, proceed to event 4.

2 Geisha Bushi (B)	Level 7 Soldier
Medium natural humanoid, human	XP 300 each
HP 77; **Bloodied** 38	**Initiative** +9
AC 23, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 18	**Perception** +10
Speed 6	

Standard Actions

Wakizashi (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 6 damage.
Effect: The target is marked until the end of the bushi's next turn.

Shuriken to the Gut (weapon) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +12 vs. AC. This attack doesn't provoke opportunity attacks.
Hit: 3d6 + 5 damage, and the target is immobilized and takes ongoing 5 damage (save ends both).
Miss: The target is immobilized until the end of its next turn.

Triggered Actions

Stand, You Coward ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: An enemy within 5 squares of the bushi and marked by it uses an attack power that doesn't include it as a target.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): Shuriken to the gut recharges, and the bushi uses it against the triggering enemy.

Skills Acrobatics +12, Bluff +11, Insight +10

Str 16 (+6)	**Dex** 18 (+7)	**Wis** 15 (+5)
Con 13 (+4)	**Int** 12 (+4)	**Cha** 16 (+6)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment kimono, wakizashi, 10 shuriken

Event 3: Benevolence

Combat Encounter Level 10 (2,600 XP) and Skill Challenge Level 8 (700 XP)

Accompanied by Jushiro, the characters can proceed up the hill on the eastern side of Kudoku. The monastery, having mysteriously fallen into decrepitude in a short time, is at the top. Characters who choose to repair or improve the monastery and its environs are rewarded for following Jin, the virtue of benevolence and compassion. Yamato Sheng, a cruel monk and a member of the Five Deadly Shadows, accompanies and tests them before doing battle.

Jushiro explains that the monastery was a service to the community. When Hiro-Yun died and the monks left, the place seemed to quickly crumble into disuse. Characters who ask about this phenomenon can make a DC 16 Arcana check, History check, or Religion check to discern that the speed with which the monastery decayed was unusual and perhaps magical in nature.

When the characters head for the monastery, read:

On the far eastern side of the town of Kudoku, stone steps wind their way up a steep tree-covered hill. A roof can be glimpsed at its peak. On either side of the base of the hill are cracked pots that once held incense, and broken incense sticks lie in the dirt.

Sitting on a step a few feet higher than you is a middle-aged monk dressed in red silk robes, the hair on his balding head tied back into a short topknot. He expertly plays a mournful tune on his hiragana flute. It is not until the song is complete that he lowers his flute and lifts his gaze, his piercing eyes measuring you.

Yamato Sheng

Jushiro nervously introduces the characters to his new master, Yamato Sheng. Sheng-sama defeated Jushiro's previous master. He is filled with disdain for the characters and accuses Jushiro of being weak and seeking the help of others to perform his duties. Jushiro begs forgiveness from his master, promising he did not ask the characters for help.

If he is asked about the assassins, Sheng-sama admits he knows the location of one of the assassins (he plans on telling them the location of the farmer, but will not admit his own status as a Deadly Shadow). He promises to give them this information when they reach the monastery atop the hill. As the characters engage in the test of benevolence, he climbs the steps ahead of them, keeping his distance, and goads and taunts them throughout the process.

If the characters ask about the damaged pots and incense, Yamato Sheng blames Jushiro for being unable to do his duty and asks them what they intend to do about it.

Skill Challenge: Test of Benevolence

The characters can choose to help repair the monastery as they climb the hill. As they do so, Yamato derides their attempts as dishonorable for their station, ridicules their failures, and shames Jushiro. Try to encourage players to behave in character; it should not be immediately obvious that this is a skill challenge.

If the characters earn three or more overall successes in the five stages of the challenge described below, they have successfully completed the test of benevolence, which provides them with a substantial benefit in the fight against Yamato.

If at any time the characters initiate combat, Yamato mocks them and then disappears in a cloud of black smoke. The characters find him in the garden at the top of the hill. Any further attempts to repair the monastery automatically fail.

Stage 1: Pots and Incense. Supplies to repair the pots and fresh incense can be obtained in the town for a few silver pieces. The characters can also fashion an incense holder (DC 12 Religion or Streetwise, each character can either attempt a check or assist) and use the incense from the repair shack (see stage 2). If the incense holders are repaired and the incense lit, an overall success is earned in the skill challenge.

Continuing upward, you reach a long building that once housed monks. It could not do so in its current state. The window screens are damaged, the roof leaks, and the shoji doors have fallen off their hinges. A small shack to one side is leaning dangerously, as if about to fall over.

Jushiro, if he is asked, dimly recalls living here with the monks. He does not ask the characters to make any repairs, though he admits he would do so if he had the time and energy.

Stage 2: Fixing the Barracks. The shack holds rusted tools and supplies once used by the monks, including hammers, nails, shoji screen, lumber, torches, oil, and incense. Though appearing to be in poor shape, they are adequate for repair work. If the characters decide to help, each character should choose a task and propose a skill he or she will use. Any plausible skill can be used (DC 16). If at least half of the characters succeed on their checks, the group gains an overall success in the skill challenge.

Beyond the barracks you find the trail lined by stone torch holders. Many of the holders are toppled over, and their torches burned out or missing.

Stage 3: Lighting the Torches. Characters can right and repair the stone holders (DC 22 Athletics or Endurance), or light the fires (DC 22 Arcana or Religion, as the stones have a magical effect that when triggered allows the torches to burn slowly and brightly). Other characters can assist on both activities. Each activity can contribute an overall success, for a total of two possible successes in this stage.

As the steps wind near the top, you pass a small shrine covered with weeds. A wooden bowl has fallen out of the shrine and has broken into several large pieces. Yamato Sheng shakes his head. "Outdated practices of the previous master," he says, before continuing.

Stage 4: Clearing the Shrine. Sheng-sama is livid if the characters decide to stop, and glares at them silently while he waits for them to continue the climb up the hill.

THE WAY OF ENLIGHTENMENT

The Way of Enlightenment was brought to Kozakura by Shou Lung priests in the year 462, during the reign of the Emperor Shotoken in the Eighth Cycle, and is similar to the Path of Enlightenment practiced in Shou Lung. This well-organized religion draws lessons from the life and speeches of its great teacher in an effort to guide people to spiritual perfection. This religion is divided into three main schools of belief in Kozakura.

Konjo is the highly esoteric third school of the Way of Enlightenment. This school uses the strict methods of meditation and contemplation to show that material possessions are passing illusions that change and decay. What matters is the strength of the person's spirit. This school is popular with and influences the thinking of the samurai and the ruling lords. Of all the schools, Konjo is the most difficult to follow and truest to the original intention of the Way of Enlightenment.

The shrine is covered by magic weeds that grow back moments after being cut. If a character can first remove the weeds without harming the shrine (DC 16 Athletics, Nature, Thievery, or other suitable skill), a DC 16 Religion check or a DC 22 Arcana check can be used to cleanse the shrine and prevent the weeds from returning. The party earns an overall success if the shrine is refurbished.

The shrine is dedicated to the Way of the Enlightenment (see the sidebar). A depression in the top is where the wooden bowl once rested.

Stage 5: Repairing the Bowl. The shattered pieces of the bowl are similar to a puzzle. A DC 20 Perception check or Thievery check allows a character to put the bowl back together. Re-forming the bowl counts as an overall success in the skill challenge.

In addition, the first character to place a donation in the bowl receives a benefit. A few gold pieces might grant a character a +2 to damage rolls during the first round of the upcoming combat. A donation of 100–300 gp might give the character's attacks 1d6 extra radiant damage for the encounter. A larger donation could also provide a restorative benefit, such as starting the encounter with temporary hit points. The exact reward is left to the DM to devise based on the character and the donation.

Battle at the Monastery's Peak

The condition of the monastery depends on the results of the characters' efforts to restore the trail. If the heroes achieved three or more overall successes, they find the monastery and the water garden beautiful and well maintained (and Jushiro is amazed at the restoration). If the characters failed or did not attempt to restore the path, the monastery is crumbling and the garden overgrown.

If the party succeeded in the skill challenge, read:

The steps finally crest the hill. A tranquil garden fills your view, a monastery in the background. Wooden walkways crisscross pools of blue water decorated with delicate stonework, reeds, and pink lotus. Two large statues of monks, their hands clasped together in prayer, stand in two of the pools. Meditation areas with golden tatami mats are placed in particularly serene locations.

Sheng-sama walks to one of the meditation areas. When he turns to face you, his visage is twisted with rage. "How dare you meddle in my affairs? Do you think you will stop Kudoku's descent into madness? I promised the name of the assassin, and you shall have it: Atsuo Toru poses as a simple farmer. However, you will never meet him! I too am one of the Five Deadly Shadows, and you will die here today!"

If the characters succeeded in the skill challenge, they gain access to the Celestial Step fantastic terrain, and the water is shallow. See the terrain descriptions below.

If the party failed or did not perform the skill challenge, read:

The steps finally crest the hill. A twisted garden fills your view, a monastery in the background. Wooden walkways crisscross pools of gray water decorated with broken stonework, matted reeds, and black lotus. Two large crumbling statues of monks, hands clasped together in prayer, stand in two of the pools. Meditation areas with rotten tatami mats offer views of the despoiled landscape.

Sheng-sama walks to one of the meditation areas. When he turns to face you he laughs, mocking you once more. "Did you think to stop Kudoku's descent into madness? You have failed, because you lack the compassion to right what is wrong."

"I promised the name of the assassin, and you shall have it: Atsuo Toru poses as a simple farmer. However, you will never meet him! I too am one of the Five Deadly Shadows, and you will die here today!"

I KNOW KUNG FU!

This encounter is meant to be cinematic. Yamato Sheng is a martial arts master in the Wuxian style. Borrow from classic martial arts movies as you describe his powers. If players respond in kind with roleplaying and descriptive combat, consider awarding them a benefit, such as a bonus to attack rolls, regaining a healing surge, or recharging a spent encounter power. If the characters failed the skill challenge, they might instead gain access to the Celestial Step fantastic terrain feature once during the encounter.

The Celestial Step fantastic terrain is not available to the characters, and the water is a greater hazard, if the party failed the preceding skill challenge.

Light: The area is brightly lit.

Monsters: Yamato Sheng (Y), 2 spinning statues (traps).

Treasure: See "Defeating Yamato," below.

Tactics: Yamato Sheng is a tactically minded combatant. Powers such as *tempest of the four winds* allow him to select the characters he faces and to use the poisonous terrain to his advantage. He likes to open with *flying battle step* on leaders or controllers, then groups up his foes with *meditation upon space and time* and spends an action point to use *spinning leg sweep* on everyone in the group.

The training statues roll initiative normally, activating as soon as a character is in range. They lack intelligence and do not coordinate with Yamato Sheng.

Tainted Water

The pools contain shallow tainted water. The taint is lessened if the party succeeded in the skill challenge prior to combat.

If the skill challenge was a success: The water is shallow and thus does not impede movement. A character who starts his or her turn in tainted water takes 5 poison damage.

If the skill challenge was not successful: Squares with water are deep enough to be difficult terrain. A character who either enters tainted water or starts his or her turn there takes 5 poison damage. Forced movement can deal this damage only once per turn.

Celestial Step

This special fantastic terrain is accessible to characters if they succeeded in the skill challenge. The restoration of the monastery results in a blessing that affects the entire encounter area, turning it

Yamato Sheng (Y) **Level 9 Solo Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 2,000

HP 388; **Bloodied** 194 **Initiative** +13
AC 23, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 21 **Perception** +13
Speed 8
Immune poison
Saving Throws +5; **Action Points** 2

Traits

Tranquil Step
Yamato ignores all damage and effects from hazardous terrain.

Harmony of Body and Mind
When starting his turn dazed, dominated, immobilized, restrained, slowed, or stunned, Yamato can end one condition and take 10 damage.

Standard Actions

Reaching Steel Fist ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +14 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 8 damage, and Yamato can slide the target 1 square.

Flying Battle Step (teleportation) **✦ At-Will**
Effect: Yamato teleports up to 5 squares as many as three times and uses *reaching steel fist* after each teleport. He can target different creatures with these attacks.

Spinning Leg Sweep ✦ Encounter
Attack: Close burst 2 (enemies in the burst); +12 vs. Reflex
Hit: 3d8 + 5 damage, and the target must spend a standard action to stand up (save ends).
Miss: Half damage.
Effect: Yamato knocks the target prone.

Move Actions

Tempest of the Four Winds ✦ Recharge ⚁ ⚂ ⚁
Effect: Yamato pushes each enemy adjacent to him 2 squares and then flies up to his speed. He must end this movement on a solid surface.

Minor Actions

Meditation upon Time and Space (teleportation) **✦ Recharge** ⚂ ⚁
Attack: Close burst 3 (creatures in the burst); +12 vs. Fortitude
Hit: Yamato teleports the target to another square in the burst.

Triggered Actions

Redirection of Force (teleportation) **✦ At-Will**
Trigger: An enemy misses Yamato.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): Yamato teleports up to his speed to a space adjacent to the triggering enemy and uses *reaching steel fist* against it.

Relentless Mantis Step ✦ Encounter
Trigger: Yamato is first bloodied.
Effect (Free Action): Tempest of the four winds recharges, and Yamato uses it.

Skills Acrobatics +16, Athletics +12, Endurance +12
Str 17 (+7) **Dex** 24 (+11) **Wis** 18 (+8)
Con 17 (+7) **Int** 11 (+4) **Cha** 13 (+5)
Alignment evil **Languages** Abyssal, Common

into fantastic terrain. Foes do not gain access to the terrain.

If the skill challenge was a success: When a character rolls an even number on an attack roll and hits, the character gains a fly speed equal to his or her land speed until the end of the character's next turn. When the character flies, he or she gains a +4 bonus to AC against opportunity attacks. A character who is flying at the end of any of his or her turns lands safely in the nearest unoccupied square.

Defeating Yamato

When the last blow is about to strike him down, Yamato Sheng asks for mercy. Allow the character to hold his or her blow if desired. Yamato Sheng has seen the error of his ways and begs for compassion. This is an opportunity for roleplaying. Yamato seems sincere.

If the characters either succeeded in the skill challenge or decide to grant Yamato mercy, the character for Jin (Benevolence/Compassion) appears on their robes, no longer faded.

When the encounter is over, characters will likely wish to proceed to find Atsuo Toru. If the heroes ask Jushiro for help, he suggests heading for the farmers' shacks on the southeast edge of town. If the characters have not faced the geishas (event 2), they find that the tea house is conveniently along the way. Otherwise, proceed with the second test of honor (event 4).

2 Spinning Statues **Level 7 Trap**
Object XP 300 each

Detect Perception (see below) **Initiative** +8
HP 70
AC 19, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 17, **Will** –
Immune necrotic, poison, psychic, forced movement, all conditions; **Resist 10** acid

Standard Actions

Spinning Limbs ✦ At-Will
Attack: Close burst 3 (enemies in the burst); +14 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 6 damage, and the target slides 2 squares in a random direction.

Countermeasures

✦ Predict: Perception DC 16. *Success:* The character spots bloodstains on the statues' arms.
✦ Predict: Perception DC 23. *Success:* The character notices the statues are built to move their arms and torsos and notices a control panel on each.
✦ Disable: Thievery DC 23 (move action). *Requirement:* The character must be adjacent to the statue. *Success:* The first success imposes a -4 penalty to the statue's attacks. A second success disables the statue. *Failure (18 or lower):* The statue attacks the character as a free action.
✦ Destroy: If a statue is reduced to 0 hit points, it is destroyed.

Event 4: Honor, Part 2

Roleplaying Encounter

With the knowledge gleaned from Yamato, the characters now have an opportunity to track down the next assassin, Atsuo Toru. Begin this encounter as they are traveling toward the poor section of town.

When everyone is ready to proceed, read:
A loud crash behind you draws your attention. A young man in the clothes of a commoner has stumbled over crates filled with rotten melons. He stands up and points at you. "Miserable dogs! I want to join the Five Deadly Shadows and make lots of money. You try to ruin my chances! I will defeat you and prove myself to them!" He moves forward, slips on a melon, and falls onto his rear end.

Allow the players to react, then read:
He rises once more, this time more cautiously. "You laugh at me? Which one of you is brave enough to fight me?" He draws a farmer's kama and steps forward.

This encounter is a test of honor. The man, named Yuzo, is clearly no match for them. If the characters bear his insults and refuse to fight him, they behave honorably and complete the test of honor. The kanji for Meiyo (Honor) appears on their robes. Each character can choose to either regain a daily power or gain 10 temporary hit points.

Event 5: Honesty

Combat Encounter Level 8 (1,750 XP) and Skill Challenge Level 8 (350 XP)

When the characters continue their journey to Atsuo Toru, read:
Your search for Atsuo Toru takes you to the southeast of Kudoku, where poor farmers and commoners live. Untended fields can be seen in the distance when you finally reach the cluster of buildings where Atsuo is said to live.

Atsuo Toru

Atsuo Toru's tale is that of a reluctant assassin. When the Deadly Shadows came to his father and asked for protection money, Atsuo fought the gang members. After he defeated the third group of thugs that was sent against him, the leader of the assassins came to see him. He gave Atsuo a choice: Become an assassin or see his family perish. Under Namiko's tutelage, Atsuo learned the ways of magic to complement his fighting skill. However, his family comes first. If the characters show virtue and explain that harm will eventually come to his family if he remains an assassin, he might surrender.

Test of Honesty

Before they can interact with Atsuo, the characters meet his family. The family members ask why they have come. Honesty is important, enabling the family to understand the truth about their son—a truth they have suspected but never voiced. By understanding the truth, they can gain peace and help their son. This test is primarily a roleplaying encounter, but you can call for skill checks as appropriate. Success rewards characters with experience points as if they had completed a skill challenge.

1: Daughter. The door is answered by a young, round-faced girl in a pretty blue and white dress. She says she is named Maemi and is almost nine years old. She asks why the characters have come. If they are truthful, she nods quietly and lets them in. If they lie, she instantly grows happy, pestering them with questions revolving around the lie. ("How do you know my brother? Are you good friends? He didn't mention you. Do you know why this town is so sad?")

2: Mother. Maemi leads them through the kitchen, where her short and squat mother, Yeoh, is preparing bowls of steaming noodles with vegetables. Yeoh politely asks the purpose of their visit. She does not react either way, insisting they sit down at the small table to enjoy a bowl of noodles. She says little and calls them by the honorific "-sama."

3: Father. Atsuo's father, Chen, sits in a small den and smokes from a long, thin pipe while stroking his long black and gray beard. He too politely asks the nature of their visit.

If in each case the characters are honest, the family members accept the truth. If the characters are honest with just some of the family members, those members ask them if they have told the others the same thing. By telling the family the truth, they have demonstrated the virtue of honesty. The kanji for Makoto (Honesty) appears on their robes.

Combat in the Garden

The characters are finally taken by Maemi out the back door to meet Atsuo.

The rear door opens up onto a small walled yard. Vegetables are planted in several places, and three tall stone statues of horned beast-headed humanoids, perhaps intended as scarecrows, dot the yard. A tan-skinned man in the loose clothes of a farmer waters the vegetables, a large naginata within reach. Seeing you, he lowers the watering pail, grabs his polearm, and stands up. He reveals stained and broken teeth as he speaks. "You bring trouble to my home?"

Atsuo allows the characters to speak, but is quick to anger and soon initiates combat. If the characters have made good points, he might continue the discussion while fighting. You can allow periodic Insight checks to reveal that his resolve is breaking. The characters can convince him to surrender when he is at one-quarter of his hit points.

Atsuo knows that the fourth assassin, Kenzo Harima, died in the fight with Hiro Yun. Atsuo

provides the location of the warehouse where Kenzo died. If he is asked, he says no one knows the identity of the fifth leader of the Deadly Shadows. If Atsuo is killed, his family can share the location of the warehouse, telling them that Atsuo frequented the place.

Light: The area is brightly lit.

Monsters: Atsuo Toru (A), minotaur soldier, minotaur charger, demonic savage minotaur. The starting locations of the three minotaurs are indicated on the map by images of statues; you can place each monster where you choose.

Treasure: See "Test of Honesty," above.

Lore: Namiko Li used protective magic on Atsuo's garden that turned his scarecrows into fearsome protectors—now they are minotaurs made of stone. You might wish to describe them as statues of horned oni to tie them more closely to the setting.

Tactics: Atsuo stays near prime targets so that his allies benefit from his aura when charging. He opens with *crimson bolt* on a leader or a character who has a ranged attack, but switches to *incite rage* if confronted by a character with a strong melee basic attack.

The minotaur soldier and the demonic savage minotaur work together, focusing on a melee target and using triggered actions to gain extra attacks.

The minotaur charger alternates attacks between a foe near Atsuo and one also being targeted by the soldier and the brute.

If the party showed honesty: The demonic savage minotaur begins play bloodied, and the minotaur charger's and minotaur soldier's defenses are lowered by 2.

Terrain Features

Both the shallow stream and the vegetable gardens are difficult terrain. The small shrine provides cover, and it is dedicated to ancestral spirits. An unconscious character gains a +2 bonus to death saving throws if within 5 squares of the shrine.

Atsuo Toru (A) **Level 9 Controller**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 400

HP 96; **Bloodied** 48 **Initiative** +5
AC 23, **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 23 **Perception** +12
Speed 6

Traits

☼ **Stone Garden's Master ✦ Aura** 3
Any ally of Toru's that starts its turn in the aura gains a +2 power bonus to attack rolls and damage rolls when attacking at the end of a charge until the end of that ally's turn.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Naginata** (weapon) **✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +14 vs. AC
Hit: 2d4 + 10 damage, and Atsuo Toru slides the target up to 2 squares.
Miss: Toru can slide the target 1 square.

✧ **Incite Rage** (charm, psychic) **✦ At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +12 vs. Will
Hit: 1d6 + 4 psychic damage, and the target uses a free action to charge a creature of Toru's choosing.

↗ **Crimson Bolt** (fire, lightning) **✦ Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +12 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d10 + 5 lightning damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 fire damage and cannot shift (save ends both).

Triggered Actions

↓ **Naginata Fling ✦ At-Will**
Trigger: An enemy adjacent to Atsuo Toru deals damage to him.
Attack (Immediate Reaction): Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 1d6 + 4 damage, and Toru pushes the target up to 3 squares.

Skills Bluff +14, Insight +12

Str 18 (+8)	**Dex** 12 (+5)	**Wis** 16 (+7)
Con 16 (+7)	**Int** 15 (+6)	**Cha** 20 (+9)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal, Common

Minotaur Soldier (S) **Level 8 Soldier**
Medium elemental humanoid (earth) XP 350

HP 89; **Bloodied** 44 **Initiative** +8
AC 24, **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 19 **Perception** +11
Speed 6

Standard Actions

⊕ **Battleaxe** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 8 damage, and the minotaur uses *shield bash* against the same target.

Minor Actions

⸸ **Shield Bash** ✦ **At-Will** (1/round)
Requirement: The minotaur must be using a shield.
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 1d6 damage, and the target falls prone.

Triggered Actions

⸸ **Goring Toss** ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: An enemy adjacent to the minotaur shifts.
Attack (Immediate Interrupt): Melee 1 (triggering enemy); +11 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d6 + 5 damage, the target is immobilized until the end of its turn, and the minotaur slides the target up to 2 squares to a square adjacent to the minotaur.

Str 20 (+9) **Dex** 14 (+6) **Wis** 14 (+6)
Con 17 (+7) **Int** 10 (+4) **Cha** 13 (+5)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment heavy shield, battleaxe

Minotaur Charger (C) **Level 9 Skirmisher**
Medium elemental humanoid (earth) XP 400

HP 94; **Bloodied** 47 **Initiative** +9
AC 23, **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 20 **Perception** +10
Speed 6

Traits

Deft Charge
While the minotaur is charging, its movement does not provoke opportunity attacks.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Falchion** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC
Hit: 4d4 + 7 damage.

⸸ **Handaxe** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +14 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 7 damage.

Triggered Actions

↷ **Goring Rush** ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: An enemy adjacent to the minotaur deals damage to the minotaur.
Attack (Immediate Reaction): Melee 1 (triggering enemy); +12 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 1d6 + 5 damage, and the minotaur can push the target 1 square and then shift 1 square to the square the target occupied. The minotaur can push the target and shift four more times in this way.

Str 20 (+9) **Dex** 17 (+7) **Wis** 13 (+5)
Con 14 (+6) **Int** 10 (+4) **Cha** 14 (+6)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment falchion, 4 handaxes

Demonic Savage Minotaur (D) **Level 11 Brute**
Medium elemental humanoid (earth) XP 600

HP 140; **Bloodied** 70 **Initiative** +8
AC 23, **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 20 **Perception** +7
Speed 8

Standard Actions

⊕ **Claws** ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one or two creatures); +16 vs. AC. If the minotaur targets only one creature, it can make this attack twice against that creature.
Hit: 2d6 + 5 damage, and the minotaur grabs the target (escape DC 19) if it has fewer than two creatures grabbed.

⸸ **Impale** ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature grabbed by the minotaur); +14 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 5d8 + 13 damage. The target falls prone and is no longer grabbed by the minotaur.

Triggered Actions

⸸ **Goring Assault** ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: An enemy within 10 squares of the minotaur hits it with a ranged or area attack.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The minotaur charges the triggering enemy

Str 22 (+11) **Dex** 16 (+8) **Wis** 15 (+7)
Con 20 (+10) **Int** 5 (+2) **Cha** 7 (+3)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal, Common

Event 6: Courage

Combat Encounter Level 10 (2,500 XP) and Minor Quest (250 XP)

Ominous clouds gather overhead, and the sun is low on the horizon as you approach the old warehouse said to have housed the Deadly Shadow known as Kenzo Harima. If the rumors are true, the magistrate Hiro Yun met the Shadows here and was killed. You open a door to the pitch-black warehouse, and the stench of death washes over you.

It is dark inside the warehouse, and the heroes need a light source. However, they find that the light sources provide only 5 squares of light and flicker as if ready to extinguish, regardless of the source of light. The characters smell something horrible and rotten, which if they follow the odor will lead them between stacks of crates filled with illicit goods until they come upon an open space.

When the characters reach the center of the warehouse, read:

Two bodies lie horribly mutilated in this area. One bears the sash of a magistrate and must be Hiro Yun-sama. As you watch, his spirit rises out of his body. The pale white body of Kenzo Harima convulses and sits up awkwardly. His chest is riddled with the daggers that claimed his life. Both figures pause for a moment; then Hiro tries to speak. A torturous wail comes forth. Hiro screams, "All is lost! I have doomed Kudoku! I will never rejoin my ancestors!" With a wet sound the daggers pull from Kenzo's body and Hiro's katana lifts into the air, the blades suddenly poised to attack you!

Light: The area is dark, and any light sources have a maximum range of 5 squares.

Monsters: Hiro Yun, Kenzo Harima, 12 flying daggers (D), flying bloody katana (K), flying dagger swarm (S). The starting locations of Hiro and Kenzo are indicated by the two bodies on the map; Hiro is the one closer to the center of the open area.

Treasure: When the flying bloody katana is defeated, it drops to the ground, glowing with golden light. It is a *+2 lifedrinker weapon*. Hiro allows the party to keep his ancestral weapon as a sign of gratitude.

Lore: Hiro Yun tracked Kenzo to his warehouse, unaware that an ambush had been set by the Five Deadly Shadows. Kenzo was won over by Hiro's virtues and had a change of heart. When he tried to help Hiro, the remaining Shadows killed both of them. It was here that Namiko Li wove the magic that prevents the two souls from returning to their ancestors and corrupts Hiro's virtues into a ritual of protection.

Tactics: Hiro remains in the center of the area. Remind the characters each turn that he is screaming about being afraid. He attacks with *gaze of sadness* unless a target is adjacent to him (but see "Saving Hiro" below).

Kenzo is initially unable to resist the call for blood, engaging wounded targets and flanking with the daggers or the katana.

At the start of combat five flying daggers are visible. Two or three additional daggers can be added each round (adjust the number of daggers to provide a suitable amount of opposition). The flying katana attempts to use *spray of blood* as often and effectively as possible. The other daggers and the swarm act without intelligence.

Crates

The 4-foot-tall crates provide cover and can be climbed with a DC 10 Athletics check.

Saving Hiro

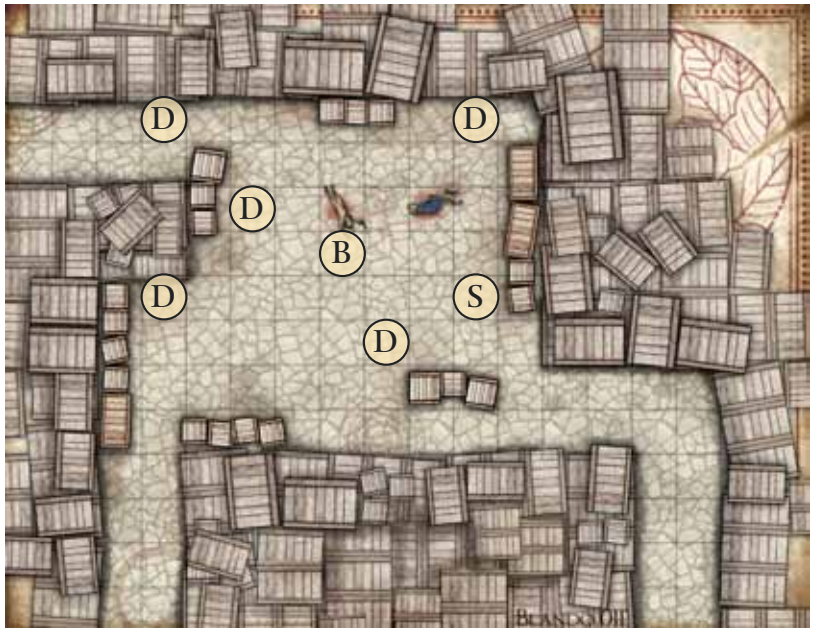
Hiro's spirit is suffering from hopelessness and fear—the antithesis of the virtue of courage. Each round at the start of his turn, Hiro attempts a saving throw. He

attacks a member of the party if he fails the saving throw or takes the total defense action if he saves.

If necessary, prompt the characters to attempt a DC 15 Insight check as a free action to realize he is overcome with fear and struggling to control himself. Once the characters realize this fact, each of them can spend a minor action once per round to provide encouragement or counter the negative effect on Hiro. Every time the characters achieve a certain number of total successes on these attempts, Hiro gains an increasingly higher bonus to his saving throws (see the list below).

You can simulate this activity by having the characters make checks (DC 15) using appropriate skills, such as Arcana, Diplomacy, Heal, and Religion. This can also be an opportunity for you to reward creative thinking and roleplaying on the part of the players with successes. Successes have additional effects as described below, each occurring on the acting character's turn:

- 1 success (+1 bonus): Amid his cries of fear, Hiro asks the characters to continue to help him.
- 2 successes (+2 bonus): Hiro manages to tell the characters that Kenzo Harima is on his side and asks them not to kill him. Hiro's *weeping aura* shrinks to a size of 5.
- 4 successes (+3 bonus): Hiro calls out to Kenzo to surrender. Characters' attempts to aid Kenzo can now also count as successes in helping Hiro.
- 6 successes (+4 bonus): The flying daggers now also target Hiro and ignore his insubstantial trait. Hiro begins to feel courage, sensing that perhaps all is not lost. Kenzo's attacks are now at a –2 penalty.
- 8 successes (+5 bonus): Hiro's *weeping aura* no longer functions. Kenzo no longer fights.
- 10 successes: Hiro's courage returns. He no longer needs to make this saving throw, and he and Kenzo aid the party in combat.



When the characters achieve 10 successes (whether or not combat is completed), the kanji for Yu (Courage) appears on their robes. Each character regains two healing surges and either a daily power or a spent magic item daily power (you can adjust the reward based on the strength of the party).

Hiro and Kenzo thank the characters profusely for their courage and for saving their souls. Before vanishing, they provide the identity of the fifth assassin: Sujin Makoto, the new magistrate.

Hiro Yun **Level 8 Controller**
Medium shadow humanoid (undead) XP 350

HP 64; **Bloodied** 32 **Initiative** +7
AC 19, **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 20 **Perception** +8
Speed 0, fly 6 (hover) Darkvision
Immune disease, poison

Traits

☼ **Weeping Aura** (psychic) ✦ **Aura** 10
Living creatures in the aura take a –2 penalty to all defenses.

Insubstantial
Hiro takes half damage from any damage source, except those that deal force damage or radiant damage. In addition, if Hiro takes radiant damage, he loses the insubstantial trait until the end of his next turn.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Sorrowful Touch** (necrotic, psychic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d8 + 5 psychic damage, and the target is grief-stricken (save ends). While grief-stricken, the target gains vulnerable psychic 5 and is dazed.

➢ **Gaze of Sadness** (psychic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +12 vs. Will
Hit: 2d8 + 5 psychic damage, and the target takes a –2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends).

Triggered Actions

↯ **Woeful Shriek** (psychic) ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: Hiro is bloodied.
Attack: Close burst 5 (enemies in the burst); +11 vs. Will
Hit: 2d8 + 5 psychic damage, and the target is grief-stricken (save ends). While grief-stricken, the target gains vulnerable psychic 5 and is dazed.

Skills Insight + 13, Stealth +12
Str 17 (+7) **Dex** 17 (+7) **Wis** 18 (+8)
Con 15 (+6) **Int** 12 (+5) **Cha** 18 (+8)
Alignment good **Languages** Common

Kenzo Harima **Level 8 Lurker**
Medium natural humanoid, human (undead) XP 350

HP 68; **Bloodied** 34 **Initiative** +13
AC 22, **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 19 **Perception** +10
Speed 6 Darkvision
Immune disease, fear; **Resist** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant

Traits

Nimble Reaction
Kenzo gains a +2 bonus to AC against opportunity attacks.

Standard Actions

(+) Vanishing Strike (illusion, weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d6 + 9 damage, or 3d6 + 9 if Kenzo has combat advantage against the target, and Kenzo becomes invisible until the start of his next turn.

Triggered Actions

Swift Rebuke ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: An enemy adjacent to Kenzo hits or misses him with a melee attack.
Effect (Immediate Interrupt): Kenzo uses *vanishing strike* against the triggering enemy and has combat advantage against it for that attack.

Share Agony ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: Kenzo hits with a basic attack.
Effect (Free Action): The triggering attack also deals ongoing 5 psychic damage (save ends).

Skills Acrobatics +14, Stealth +14, Thievery +14
Str 10 (+4) **Dex** 20 (+9) **Wis** 13 (+5)
Con 14 (+6) **Int** 13 (+5) **Cha** 15 (+6)
Alignment good **Languages** Common

12 Flying Daggers (D) **Level 7 Minion Lurker**
Small natural animate XP 75 each

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. **Initiative** +10
AC 21, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 17 **Perception** +8
Speed 2, fly 6 Darkvision

Traits

Nimble Blade
While the flying dagger has a creature grabbed, the flying dagger gains a +2 bonus to AC and Reflex.

Standard Actions

(+) Pinning Thrust ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC. While the flying dagger has a creature grabbed, it can use *pinning thrust* only against that creature, and it hits automatically.
Hit: 6 damage, and the flying dagger grabs the target (escape DC 16). Until the target is no longer grabbed by any daggers, it takes damage at the start of its turn equal to the number of flying daggers grabbing it. The target takes this damage once each turn, regardless of how many daggers are grabbing it.

Skills Stealth +11
Str 8 (+2) **Dex** 17 (+6) **Wis** 11 (+3)
Con 13 (+4) **Int** 2 (-1) **Cha** 5 (+0)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

Flying Bloody Katana (B) **Level 9 Skirmisher**
Small natural animate (undead) XP 400

HP 96; **Bloodied** 48 **Initiative** +11
AC 23, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 21 **Perception** +7
Speed 2, fly 6 Darkvision
Immune poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic

Traits

Necromantic Flight
A flying bloody katana that takes radiant damage cannot fly until the end of its next turn; if in the air, it falls.

Standard Actions

(+) Lifedrinking Thrust ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 8 damage, and the flying bloody katana recharges *spray of blood*.

Spray of Blood (necrotic) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Close blast 3 (living creatures in the blast); +12 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 1d6 + 8 psychic and necrotic damage, and the target is blinded until the end of the katana's next turn.
Effect: Undead and animates in the blast can shift 2 squares as a free action.

Move Actions

Parrying Flight ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The flying bloody katana flies 5 squares. This movement does not provoke opportunity attacks.

Triggered Actions

Necrotic Miasma (necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: The flying bloody katana drops to 0 hit points.
Attack (No Action): Close burst 2 (living creatures in the burst); +12 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 1d6 + 2 necrotic damage, and the target is weakened until the end of its next turn.

Str 7 (+2) **Dex** 20 (+9) **Wis** 17 (+7)
Con 16 (+7) **Int** 5 (+1) **Cha** 8 (+3)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

Flying Dagger Swarm (S)	Level 10 Brute
Small natural animate (swarm)	XP 500
HP 128; **Bloodied** 64	**Initiative** +9
AC 22, **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 20	**Perception** +7
Speed 2, fly 6	Darkvision
Resist half damage from melee and ranged attacks; **Vulnerable** 5 to close and area attacks	
Traits	
☼ **Blood Frenzy ✦ Aura** 1	
Any enemy that starts its turn in the aura takes ongoing 5 damage (save ends). If that enemy is already taking untyped ongoing damage, that damage increases by 5.	
Swarm	
The swarm can occupy the same space as another creature, and an enemy can enter its space, which is difficult terrain. The swarm cannot be pulled, pushed, or slid by melee or ranged attacks. It can squeeze through any opening that is large enough for at least one of the creatures it comprises.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Swarm of Daggers ✦ At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +15 vs. AC	
Hit: 3d6 + 1 damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends).	
Triggered Actions	
Thirsting Flight ✦ At-Will	
Trigger: An enemy moves away from the swarm.	
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The swarm flies up to its fly speed to the triggering enemy's square or a square adjacent to that enemy. This movement does not provoke opportunity attacks.	
Skills Stealth +14	
Str 10 (+5) **Dex** 19 (+9) **Wis** 14 (+7)	
Con 18 (+9) **Int** 1 (+0) **Cha** 4 (+2)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	

Event 7: Rectitude and Duty

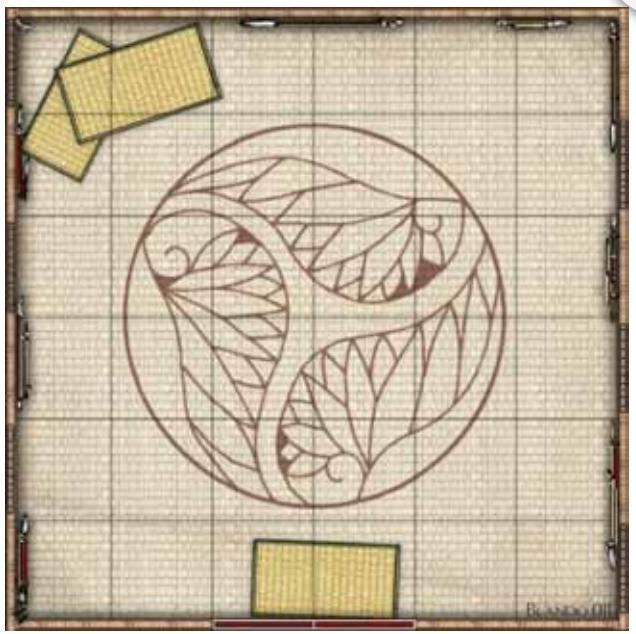
Combat Encounter Level 10 (2,600 XP) and Skill Challenge Level 8 (700 XP)

The sun has nearly set when the characters reach the magistrate's office. Sujin Makoto-sama is nervous, but composed enough to request a full report of their findings, in the order that events occurred. If necessary, he reminds them of his station and of societal protocol. If the characters initiate combat they automatically fail the test of rectitude and duty.

As the characters relate the tale, he interrupts to ask questions (in particular, questions that might pertain to any virtues they failed to accomplish). If the characters did not have any overall failures, he asks probing questions that might reveal doubt or uncertainty they had at various points. If they are forthright, they pass the test of rectitude.

Upon hearing their report (and their conclusion that he is an assassin), he reveals a scroll bearing the signature of the Emperor. It empowers him to set the law of this town. Makoto-sama asks the characters if they will oppose the Emperor's will. Allow the characters to make a DC 10 History check, Perception check, or Streetwise check to confirm the authenticity of the scroll and his statements. This is the test of duty. Characters succeed if they are loyal to the Emperor and willing to let Makoto-sama go free. They can also succeed if they are willing to commit ritual suicide to preserve their honor, or otherwise protest Makoto-sama's rule without opposing the Emperor, perhaps by desiring to seek out the Emperor for intervention.

If the characters showed rectitude and upheld duty, the kanji for Gi (Rectitude/Sincerity) and Chugi (Loyalty/Duty) appear on their robes. Makoto-sama sees that the characters truly embody the virtues of Bushido. The Emperor's scroll crumbles into dust. Sujin invites them into the next room, acknowledging



them as superiors. He asks them to allow him to die with courage for his sins. He removes his outer robes, revealing the black garb of a ninja.

If the characters failed at either test, Sujin believes that their failure enables him to accept his own shortcomings. A cloud of black smoke suddenly appears (an eggshell smoke bomb). When the smoke clears, the characters see the magistrate's robes on the floor beside an open door leading to his meditation chambers. Sujin waits within, invisible.

A large tatami mat is the only furniture in the dojo style meditation room. The walls hold an impressive array of Kara-Tur weapons. Both Sujin and the characters can use these weapons for roleplaying purposes or combat, switching weapons without any mechanical effect or penalty.

Sujin Makoto (S) **Level 9 Solo Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 2000

HP 380; **Bloodied** 190 **Initiative** +9
AC 23, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 20 **Perception** +10
Speed 8 Darkvision
Resist 5 necrotic, 5 poison
Saving Throws +5; **Action Points** 2

Traits

☼ **Death by a Thousand Cuts** (weapon) ✦ **Aura** 2
Any enemy that starts its turn in the aura takes 5 damage.

☼ **Tainted Wounds** ✦ **Aura** 5
While Sujin is bloodied, enemies in the aura regain only half the normal hit points from healing effects.

Way of the Ninja
At the start of combat, Sujin makes two initiative checks. Sujin takes a turn on both initiative counts.

Indomitable
If Sujin is dominated or stunned, he is instead dazed. If he is immobilized or restrained, he is instead slowed. Each time this trait is used, Sujin takes 5 damage.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Ninja-to Slash** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC
Hit: 2d10 + 5 damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends).

⸸ **Tumbling Assault** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC
Hit: 2d10 + 5 damage, and Sujin shifts up to 4 squares and then uses *ninja-to slash*.

Minor Actions

Smoke Bomb (illusion) ✦ **Encounter**
Effect: Sujin becomes invisible until he attacks or until the end of his next turn.

Triggered Actions

⸸ **Poisoned Blade** (poison) ✦ **Recharge** ⚅
Trigger: Sujin hits an enemy with *ninja-to slash*.
Attack (Free Action): Melee 1 (triggering enemy); +12 vs. Fortitude
Effect: The target loses a healing surge and takes ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

Shadow Evasion ✦ **Recharge** when first bloodied
Trigger: An enemy hits Sujin with a melee or ranged attack.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): Sujin shifts up to 4 squares and then becomes insubstantial until the end of the triggering enemy's next turn.

Skills Acrobatics +12, Athletics +14, Bluff +9, Stealth +12, Thievery +12

Str 20 (+9)	**Dex** 16 (+7)	**Wis** 12 (+5)
Con 15 (+6)	**Int** 14 (+6)	**Cha** 10 (+4)

Alignment evil **Languages** Common
Equipment ninja-to (short sword), 1 eggshell smoke grenade

Light: The area is brightly lit from screen windows along the walls.

Monsters: Sujin Makoto (S).

Treasure: None.

Lore: Sujin Makoto has long been an important samurai noble in the village of Kudoku. Unfortunately, he put his talents to ill use, taking the path of greed and dishonor by creating the organized crime ring known as the Deadly Shadows. When Hiro was defeated, Sujin called in favors and imposed himself as magistrate. Surprisingly, he found the experience hollow. His conscience began to feel the weight of his deeds. When the characters arrived he allowed them to do their work, perhaps hoping they would show him a better way.

Tactics: Sujin fights to the death, showing no mercy. Even if he believes the characters to be superior, the honorable path is to provide them a glorious battle.

Note: Sujin Makoto's hit points should be adjusted downward by 10 for each virtue the characters accomplished in the adventure.

Concluding the Adventure

If the characters are victorious, the despair lifts from the town. When night falls the air is clean and cool, the sky is devoid of clouds, and the stars shine bright. The villagers of Kudoku gather to celebrate and give thanks to their heroes. They whisper or call out that they see their ancestors in the sky, and others think they see a new star for Hiro Yun.

Within days the monks return. Jushiro is named the new grandmaster. Furthermore, the provincial governor hears of their great deeds. She summons them to her palace and awards each character 3,500 gp, rare art (calligraphy, poetry, or paintings) worth 2,500 gp, and one magic item of level 12 or lower. You might wish to assign items or offer each character one choice from a small list of items. The provincial governor has a need for masters of Bushido and can become a source of additional adventures.

About the Author

Teos Abadia is an administrator, developer, and author for the Ashes of Athas organized play campaign, set in the world of the Dark Sun® campaign setting. A frequent contributor to a variety of organized play campaigns and more devoted to Athas than most druids, you can find follow his musings on his community blog and on Twitter (@Alphastream). This is his first Dungeon adventure.

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Backdrop: Xiousing

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Xiousing (pronounced yow-*sing*) is a small Shou district on the northern edge of Marsember, built on land revealed when the Sea of Fallen Stars receded during the Spellplague. It was settled by Shou immigrants who sailed across the Sea of Fallen Stars and is currently governed by the venerable Duc-Sum Li.

The district is a dense cluster of buildings along narrow streets cramped with vendor stalls, surrounding fields of rice and soy. Its architecture features traditional Shou styles. At night, the streets are illuminated by rice-paper lanterns strung along the bridges that still span the drained canals. Rickshaws serve the district, as well as other locations throughout Marsember.

Non-Shou visitors flock to Xiousing in order to experience a different culture, and the streets of the marketplace are packed with curious sightseers. The stalls that pack the streets constantly offer wares to shoppers. Whether visitors are after training at the Lightning Dragon dojo, seeking a cure with exotic herbs, or searching for Shou curios, the king's gold is always welcome. Deeper within Xiousing, though, non-Shou visitors are closely monitored, and few are allowed to venture beyond the regent's palace.

The populace embraces traditional Shou values while maintaining respect for Cormyrian law. The Shou openly follow inoffensive traditions, such as taking off one's shoes before entering a guest's home,

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but downplay those that might offend the people of Cormyr, including the open worship of dragons.

History

In 1419 DR, the Year of the Empty Necropolis, a Shou noble named Duc-Sum Li was traveling through Cormyr with his young son, Chang. At that time Crown Prince Foril, son of then King Azoun V Obarskyr, was very ill with a mysterious malady, and no local remedies or rituals could cure him. Desperate for help, King Azoun summoned Duc-Sum to examine and treat his son. The Crown Prince recovered quickly, and, as a reward, the king knighted Duc-Sum Li and granted him regency over a generous parcel of land (part of the Styes) in Marsember, inhabited by Shou squatters. Duc-Sum named this Shou-town Xiousing. There, he planted medicinal herbs, trained students in the martial arts (see "The Lightning Dragon Dojo," page 7), and practiced the healing techniques of the East while also serving as the king's eyes and ears over the Shou who had settled in the area.

THE NINE GOLDEN SWORDS

The first emperor of the Li Dynasty had nine magical swords created for his generals, whom he sent out to conquer the world during the Dynasty of Might. Each blade is a different martial weapon, crafted to match the original wielder's specialty. These swords have been scattered over time, and the whereabouts of most are unknown to even the most learned scholars. Some believe that the reunited swords will usher in a new dynasty under those who wield them.

Duc-Sum Li is a descendant of Emperor Li of the Dynasty of Might. His *golden blade* has been passed down from generation to generation. Duc-Sum will likely pass his blade, and the secrets of the Lightning Dragon, on to his son.

Golden Blade Level 15+ Rare

This golden blade is one of only nine created during the Dynasty of Might by the Shou Emperor. The wielders of such blades effortlessly turn aside the attacks of their enemies.

Lvl 15	+3	25,000 gp	Lvl 25	+5	625,000 gp
Lvl 20	+4	125,000 gp	Lvl 30	+6	3,125,000 gp

Weapon: Heavy blade, light blade
Enhancement Bonus: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d8 radiant damage per plus

Property
While wielding this weapon, you gain an item bonus to Athletics checks to jump and Acrobatics checks. The bonus equals the weapon's enhancement bonus.

Attack Power ✦ Daily (Immediate Reaction)
Trigger: An adjacent enemy misses you with a melee attack.
Effect: You make a melee basic attack with this weapon against the triggering enemy.

Utility Power ✦ Encounter (Immediate Interrupt)
Trigger: You are hit by a melee or ranged attack.
Effect: You make a saving throw. If you save, the attack misses you.

Laws and Government

As regent of Xiousing, appointed by the Crown, Duc-Sum Li has the same responsibilities as all the other landed nobles of Cormyr: to defend the local farms, to dispense justice when appropriate, to keep the peace, and to collect taxes. Duc-Sum keeps tithes low so as not to burden the many poor, while just high enough to satisfy the throne in Suzail. His personal wealth has been built on levying fines against those who commit lesser crimes in Xiousing, as well as student fees from his dojo. The regent oversees trials for capital crimes, but a jury determines the accused's guilt or innocence, in accordance with Cormyrian law.

Shui Kao serves as Duc-Sum's clerk and record-keeper. He meticulously documents legal decisions, including sentencing and tax collection, in the Shou tongue. These parchment scrolls are stored in a series of shelves secured in vaults on the top floor of the regent's palace.

Organizations

In any settlement, groups of people form bonds and join organizations for a sense of belonging and purpose. Xiousing is no different, with sects ranging from those who serve the Crown to criminal elements that put their beliefs and ideals above the law.

Purple Dragon Knights

The Purple Dragon Knights stationed in Marsember are responsible for local law enforcement. However, they avoid Xiousing proper, leaving the peacekeeping responsibility to Duc-Sum Li. They do enter the district to investigate disturbances that originated beyond its border, or for capital offenses.

Most Shou residents respect the Purple Dragons and appreciate the peace that their presence brings to the greater city. Duc-Sum has recruited a few Shou who have demonstrated the understanding of duty and honor necessary to join the Purple Dragons. These Shou knights are particularly vigilant about keeping their oath and are the first on the scene at any disturbances in Xiousing.

The Purple Dragons maintain a small barracks just outside Xiousing, which also houses the Shou members recruited by Duc-Sum. Though the barracks is racially segregated, Cormyrian and Shou Purple Dragons treat each other with appropriate respect.

Nine Golden Swords

The Nine Golden Swords is a tong, or gang, of well-organized rogues and thugs, based in Westgate, with secret plans to rule Faerûn. A small chapter runs criminal operations in Xiousing, from illegal gambling halls to black-market shops. Its members keep a low profile, since they have a more important mission than merely profiting from criminal activities.

The Nine Golden Swords suspects that Duc-Sum Li wields one of the fabled Golden Swords, and the organization is ready to claim the weapon when the time comes. Its members believe that with the power of all nine *golden blades*, their conquest of the Realms will be unstoppable. The gang already holds three of the weapons, but it is patient; even if Duc-Sum's sword is one of the nine, the organization will take action only after the other blades have been located.

Cult of the Dragon

The Cult of the Dragon has many followers among both Shou and non-Shou. This evil organization worships dragons and seeks to empower them as immortal dracoliches. Since dragon motifs are common in Shou architecture, the cult can operate more openly in Xiousing than in other Cormyrian locales. Nevertheless, Xiousing is still within the borders of Cormyr, so the cultists observe subtlety.

Small gems and coins with strange markings have recently been found in the muck of the now-dry canals. The Cult of the Dragon believes that these trinkets are from the hoard of Garthanian, a great dragon slain thousands of years ago by a group of villagers who collapsed his lair, burying him alive. The cultists suspect that the dragon's resting place is somewhere below Marsember, and the ancient coins and gems suggest that it lies beneath Xiousing. At night, they excavate for the dragon's bones that they might reanimate its remains.

The Chuen

A small, loosely organized group of Shou traditionalists calling themselves the Chuen (the Pure) is growing in popularity in Xiousing. Members of this xenophobic group run Shou-only businesses, harassing half-Shou and permitting entry to foreigners only if accompanied by a Shou. They incorrectly believe that Duc-Sum founded Xiousing as a base for esyablishing Shou supremacy in the region. They have also heard the rumors that Duc-Sum Li wields one of the *golden blades*, and expect him to lead the true Shou to take their rightful place as rulers of Cormyr when the proper time comes. Duc-Sum tolerates the organization's presence, provided it does not break any laws.

Locations

Visitors entering Xiousing from elsewhere in Marsember usually arrive by passing through an archway carved with twisting dragons. Those coming in by sea can tie up at a small dock area in the northwest end of the district. In either case, the district offers an exotic microculture to explore. The town is self-sufficient, but in general its inhabitants welcome the commerce and prosperity brought by patrons of their many businesses. The southeast area caters mainly to non-Shou visitors, while locations deeper within Xiousing are less tolerant of outsiders.

The Zhao

The Zhao is a pond that provides fresh drinking water to the inhabitants of Xiousing. Some Shou catch fish in the Zhao during the warmer months and make a meager living selling their catch to the Lily Pad Inn (see below). During hot days, children dive off the Lily Pad's floating patio into the cool water.

People: Shiau Chen, proprietor of the Lily Pad Inn, barters with the Zhao fishers at midmorning each day for the freshest catch to serve at his establishment.

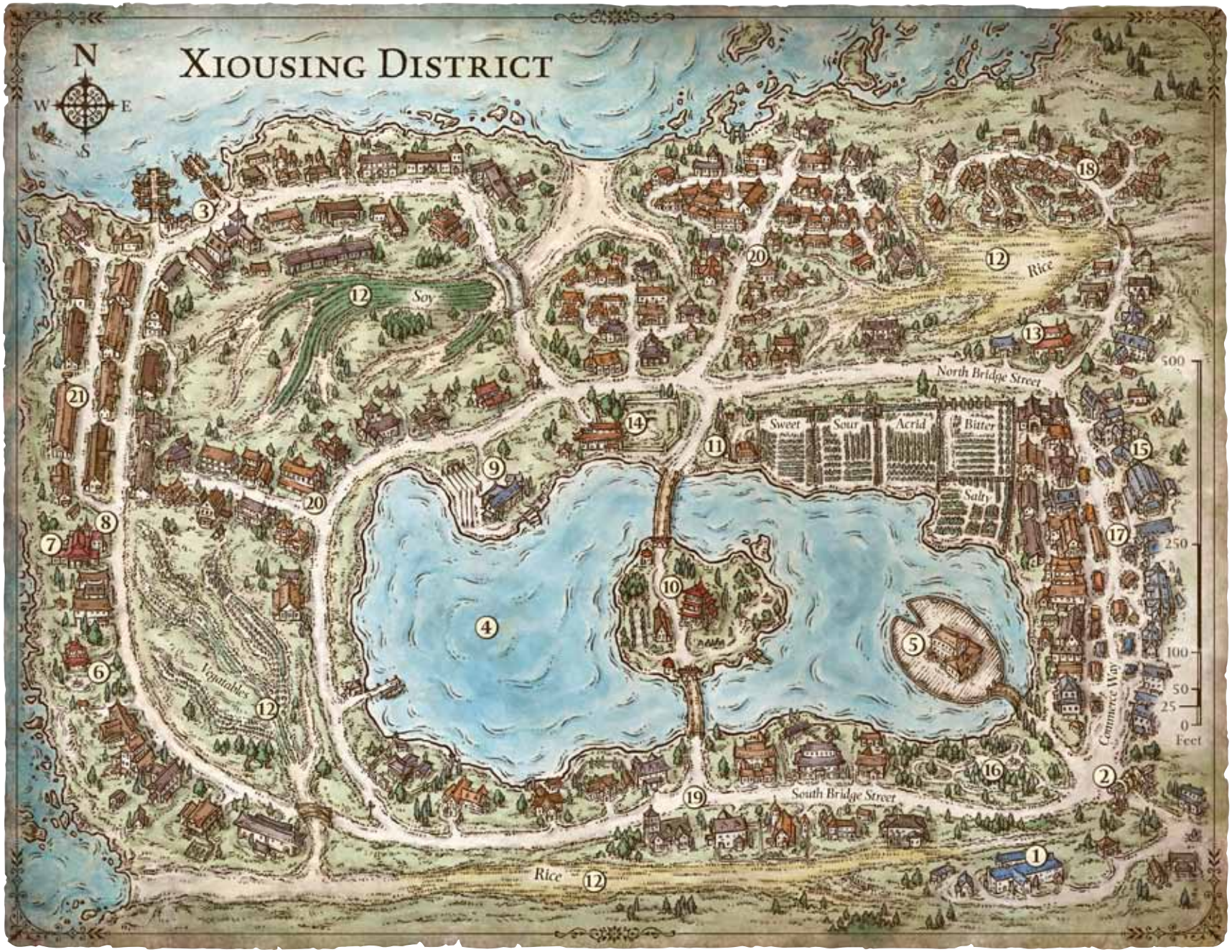
Plots: The locals have noticed the appearance of many large, engraved stones, each weighing several hundred pounds, arranged haphazardly around the Zhao. A successful DC 20 Arcana check indicates that they could be used in some sort of ritual. After a few days, perceptive characters might notice that another large stone has been placed on the north shore of the Zhao (see "The Zhao Stones," page 8).

The Lily Pad

This three-story inn, located near the archway to Xiousing, is typically the first stop for visitors. The inn offers rickshaw service to other locations within the district and greater Marsember. Shiau Chen runs the Lily Pad along with his Cormyrian wife, Cornelia, and his half-Shou children.

The inn is constructed of light wood and floats in the Zhao on pontoons. An elegant floating bridge leads to the entrance. A patio with wooden benches and low decorative railings wraps around the Lily Pad, offering pleasant views of the Zhao. Patrons retreat to the patio for meditation or to dangle their toes in the water while enjoying afternoon tea. Young lovers meet on the patio at night to gaze at the stars, to watch the colorful fish in the moonlight, or to take a midnight dip. The floating bridge is the most romantic location in town.

By crossing the threshold into the Lily Pad, a visitor leaves Cormyr behind and enters a world reminiscent of the distant East. Shiau Chen, a middle-aged Shou with a thin mustache and a long braid, warmly greets visitors to his establishment. The main room is decorated in a red-and-gold dragon motif. Patrons kneel on embroidered pillows arranged around low tables. Staff members move between tables, wheeling carts piled with bamboo bowls filled


Xiousing District
N
W
E
S
Soy
Rice
Vegetables
Rice
North Bridge Street
South Bridge Street
Commerce Way
Sweet
Sour
Acrid
Bitter
Salty
500
250
100
50
25
0
Feet

MAP KEY

1. Purple Dragon Barracks
2. Archway
3. Docks
4. The Zhao
5. The Lily Pad
6. Zhang's Teahouse
7. Double Dragon Gambling Hall
8. Shrine of Tymora
9. Chiang Laundry
10. Regent's Palace
11. Shen's Herb Garden
12. Farms
13. Yi Woo's Clinic
14. Lightning Dragon Dojo
15. Curio Shop
16. Public Gardens
17. Marketplace
18. Slums
19. Wealthy District
20. Residential Area
21. Warehouse District

with such dishes as duck-stuffed sweet buns, boiled dumplings, and fried vegetable rolls. Hot tea is provided as a courtesy to all guests.

Ping and Ling Chiang, twin sisters, provide entertainment for the patrons of the Lily Pad. Ping draws a bow across an *erhu*, a two-stringed musical instrument, and Ling dances while waving four large colorful fans, two in each hand. The inn is packed when the Chiang sisters are performing.

A stairwell leads to the second floor, which is devoted to guest rooms. The rooms are simple and functional, each containing a straw-filled mat for sleeping, a pillow, and a small chest. A long hall, flanked by rice-paper walls and sliding doors, leads to another stairwell rising to the topmost floor. The third floor is divided into quarters. One set of rooms is for the owner and his family, and the other three are luxurious suites for honored guests. All are furnished with fine wooden dressers, elaborate hand-sewn rugs, huge beds adorned in the finest silks, and work desks with padded chairs.

The inn also offers a meeting room, with a long, low table and pillows for kneeling in comfort. One chamber, containing four bunk beds and several footlockers, is designed to house a band of adventurers. It is decorated with curiosities, including painted fans on the walls, a small gong for summoning the staff, and a stuffed albino tiger in the corner, crouched as if ready to pounce. A mobile of small pieces of parchment folded into the shapes of cranes hangs from the ceiling between two paper lanterns. A stick of incense burns in a holder on the small writing desk, filling the room with the smell of warm cinnamon.

Yang Chen, son of Shiau, has opened other branches of the Lily Pad Inn in Suzail and Arabel. The other Cormyrian branches do not float on water, but they likewise offer rickshaw service to other locations in those cities. These other branches incorporate more Cormyrian motifs into their decor than the original in Xiousing.

Plots: The staff apologizes for the added expense of well-seasoned dishes, noting that there has been a recent shortage of local herbs (see "The Dying Crops," page 8).

Zhang's Teahouse

The teahouse is far away from the main entrance to Xiousing, on the shores of the Dragonmere and offering a serene view. Run by Xio Zhang, the leader of the Chuen, this Shou-only establishment boasts a wide variety of teas to soothe the soul. Over a steaming pot, enemies put their differences aside and respect the tradition of civility imposed not only by Xio Zhang and his sons, but also by thousands of years of custom.

People: Members of the Nine Golden Swords, Shou Purple Dragon Knights, and Shou nobility can be found here at all hours, talking politics or philosophy. Sometimes the groups converse with one another, but more often they keep their distance.

Plots: Some of the patrons of Zhang's are debating the role of the Purple Dragon Knights in their district. Tensions are high, because one of the knights is suspected of tampering with evidence to implicate innocent Shou citizens for crimes committed by the Nine Golden Swords (see "The Crooked Knight," page 8).

Double Dragon Gambling Hall

Like every Shou-town, Xiousing has secret gambling halls accessible by invitation only. The entrance to the Double Dragon Gambling Hall is through a curtain at the back of a closet in a modest shrine to Tymora. Tymora is the most commonly worshiped deity in Xiousing; both the Shou and the Cormyrians pay her homage.

The Double Dragon is four times the size of the shrine and features two floors of gaming: the ground floor, dedicated to commoners, and the upper floor, reserved for nobility and wealthy merchants. A special room in the back of the upper floor is dedicated to a high-stakes table. The games are familiar even to non-Shou, though dice are decorated with images

rather than pips, clay tiles replace cards, and players lay their bets in the Shou tongue. The air is thick with haze, for the herbs grown in Xiousing are not just for teas and medicines—some are also used as incense or rolled in leaves and smoked.

People: The high-stakes game in the back room includes many influential citizens, including Xio Zhang, the Purple Dragon Knight Lin Tung, Mayoy Kuo (owner of the curio shop; see page 7), and several members of the Nine Golden Swords.

Plots: The ground floor buzzes with activity, and alert characters notice that players doing well at the tables upstairs are invited to pass through a guarded doorway. If an adventurer manages to join the high-stakes game, or succeeds on a difficult Perception check to eavesdrop on the conversation within, he or she can hear Mayoy lamenting that he cannot cover his debts. His curio shop was recently robbed, and all the evidence from the scene has disappeared, so he will never be able to recover the stolen items. See "The Crooked Knight," page 8, for more.

Chiang Laundry

The Chiang Laundry is located on the north bank of the Zhao, where a family of Shou women washes clothes and linens for a reasonable price. Dei Chiang runs the laundry with her six daughters.

Natural stone steps lead down from the building into the cold water, where the Chiang women work to remove even the toughest stains. Clean garments wave in the wind on strong silk ropes. A pulley system allows the washers to rotate each drying line to the lowest level for easy access.

When they are not laundering, the Chiangs sew fabulous silk garments and robes embroidered with flowery patterns. These light wraps are very comfortable in the often humid climate of Xiousing. The dresses are traditionally tied with a sash about the waist. Wearing a bow on the right side marks a woman as single, while a bow on the left indicates that she is promised in marriage. Married women wear the bow in the back.

People: Each day at midmorning, Cornelia Chen brings laundry from the Lily Pad to be cleaned. Dei Chiang's daughters are busy working during the day, and the matron of the household has ordered them not to be disturbed.

Plots: Dei expresses a subtle put palpable hatred for Cornelia. She blames the Cormyrian for stealing a perfectly good Shou man from their culture, and she is especially displeased that her twin daughters Ping and Ling perform at the Lily Pad. Dei tells visitors that she heard about a robbery at the curio shop. She openly suspects Cornelia or one of her half-blood offspring, saying she has spotted the children stealing from carts in the marketplace.

Gossip is flying about the district concerning the young woman Soon Chiang, who was engaged to the son of a wealthy Shou merchant but mysteriously disappeared on her wedding day. The family of the groom, Chau Phat, has posted a reward for her safe return.

Regent's Palace

Duc-Sum Li and his family live in an elaborate three-story wooden building on a small island in the center of the Zhao. The palace, surrounded by lush gardens, is the tallest building in the district and boasts the finest in both Cormyrian and Shou architecture. Two bridges arch over the Zhao from the northern and southern parts of Xiousing, and a small personal dock allows direct access from the water. An open area is available for private lessons in the martial arts of the Lightning Dragon. Purple Dragon Knights in full Shou regalia are stationed at each guardhouse on the island to assist visitors.

The decorations within the palace are distinctly Shou, with engravings and painted ceremonial masks hanging from the walls. The audience chamber has one piece of furniture: a large wooden chair with a red velvet cushion. The rest of the hall is empty, providing plenty of room for supplicants to stand or kneel as they address Xiousing's regent. The second floor houses the Li family, while servant quarters and functional rooms, including the kitchen, are on the ground floor. The top floor is a restricted area, where Duc-Sum practices the tenets of the Lightning Dragon in private. Here, several vaults store legal documents and the Li family's most valuable possessions. One holds Duc-Sum's *golden blade*, which is removed only once each year, during the regent's full Lightning Dragon practice session.

People: Various members of the Li family can be found here at different times of day, and Duc-Sum rarely leaves.

Plots: If adventurers in Xiousing spend more than a day in the area and do not seek an audience with Duc-Sum Li, he sends for them to learn their business. If the adventurers are available for hire, he either asks them to investigate the problem with Chen's garden (see "The Dying Crops," page 8) or to broker a peace between the Purple Dragons and the Shou, who believe that someone is tampering with evidence in criminal cases (see "The Crooked Knight," page 8).

Shen's Herb Garden

This garden near the Zhao is surrounded by a low fence. Xiu Shen tends the garden with his wife and four children. One acre is devoted to each of the Five Flavors: acrid, sweet, bitter, sour, and salty. Shen's garden is the source of rare herbs used for medicines, teas, and incense, such as ginseng, wolfberry, cinnamon, bupleurum, ginger, licorice, peony, rhubarb, and salvia. These plants can be found nowhere else in Cormyr, and many visitors to Xiousing come to procure a bit of Shen's herbal wealth. The most exotic plant in the garden is the Red Dragon, a single large maroon bloom atop a twisted, branchlike root. As

the petals fall, they are collected to be ground up and made into a spice. Bits of the root of the Red Dragon are used in potent herbal remedies.

People: Hu Chiang can often be found here, collecting herbs for Yi Woo's clinic (see below).

Plots: Shen and Hu have noticed that the herb garden has been suffering lately. Many patches have withered, and those that do grow are wilting. This situation is a source of great concern to Duc-Sum: Not only does it affect the flavoring of food, but many of these herbs are needed for medicines. See "The Dying Crops," page 8, for more.

Farms

Old canals, crossed by crumbling bridges, lace Xiousing. The water drained from these canals during the Spellplague, leaving behind swaths of rich, fertile soil that now serve as Xiousing's farms. The former canals now house crops of rice and soy, and a few areas support extensive vegetable gardens. Farmers work their fields wearing round woven hats to protect them from the sun.

People: Burgher Xarod (see page 7) often spends time visiting farms while he wanders Xiousing, ostensibly to visit his daughter. He makes offers to purchase land from some farmers, with promises that they can continue working their fields.

Plots: If the adventurers speak with Xarod, he warns them of the danger of the current leadership, which allows the Nine Golden Swords and the Cult of the Dragon to operate freely in Xiousing. He attempts to hire the adventurers to discover evidence that he has planted in his plan to discredit the Li family.

Yi Woo's Clinic

Yi Woo runs a small clinic and tends to the health of Xiousing's inhabitants. Hu Chiang, third daughter of Dei Chiang, serves as his assistant. Yi treats all patients regardless of their ability to pay, overcharging nobles, merchants, and the obviously wealthy so that he can afford the cost of treatment for the poor, the disabled, and the homeless. He has combined the herbs and medicinal practices of the Shou with the recipes and balms of Cormyr to find unusual cures for even the rarest ailments.

Plots: Yi Woo is very concerned about some of his regulars—impoverished patients whom he has not seen in several days. Little does he know that they have been captured by the sahuagin for use as sacrifices in their upcoming ritual (see "The Zhao Stones," page 8).

The Lightning Dragon Dojo

Duc-Sum Li opened this dojo, named after his fighting style. Shou from all over Faerûn travel to Xiousing to study under Grandmaster Li. When Duc-Sum became too old to spar with his students, his son Chang took over the day-to-day management of the dojo. Now, students learn fighting skills from Chang and mental techniques from Duc-Sum. Only the most adept students prove themselves worthy to learn the secrets of the Lightning Dragon.

Plots: Members of the dojo have noticed strange rocks appearing about once a week around the Zhao (see "The Zhao Stones," page 8). Duc-Sum does not know their provenance or meaning, but he is concerned enough to ask the adventurers to investigate.

Curio Shop

Alongside other merchants who offer pottery, silks, vegetables, and fresh meat in the market, Mayoy Kuo runs this eclectic one-story shop. Anyone looking for a souvenir of the Shou culture can find something in Mayoy's store. He sells mainly vases and statues, claiming the merchandise to be much older than it actually is. However, he does have a few ancient relics in the back of the shop, including a sealed vase dating to the Hai Dynasty. The Shou markings on the vase indicate that it imprisons the spirit of the great devil Muo Guei.

Plots: Mayoy's store was recently robbed, and the most valuable item taken was an ancient tome about dragons. To make matters worse, the evidence from the robbery—notes and clues left behind by the culprits—has gone missing. Mayoy would pay well for the recovery of his property.

People of Xiousing

As in any city in Faerûn, some citizens are good and others evil. Individuals pursue their own beliefs and advance their own agendas. The Xiousing district's residents are primarily Shou, but over time the interaction between neighbors has resulted in a blending of culture. Still, the most powerful and prestigious citizens of Xiousing are all of pure Shou descent, which can cause conflict with successful residents who are considered outsiders.

Duc-Sum Li: Xiousing's regent is nearing his one hundredth birthday. His long white mustache and beard hang down to his waist. Daily workouts keep his body fit, and meditations throughout the day exercise his agile mind. He is known as a kind and fair ruler who honors and respects the vows he gave to King Azoun V when he was knighted. He has but one son, the Purple Dragon Knight Chang Li. Chang is married to Victoria, daughter of Burgher Xarod, and they have one daughter, Ying Li.

Burgher Xarod: Burgher Xarod's family has lived in Marsember for as long as anyone can remember. His grandfather was a renowned commander during the Goblin Wars. Xarod controls some of the neighborhoods near Xiousing. When the waters receded during the Spellplague, he assumed that the revealed land would fall under his domain, and he began taxing the Shou as they settled the area. He become furious when the Crown granted the land to Duc-Sum, a foreigner.

Xarod maintains a grudge to this day and plots to regain that which he believes rightfully belongs to his family. If Duc-Sum and Chang were no longer in the picture, Xiousing would pass to his daughter Victoria and be folded back into his holdings. Burgher Xarod is considering all options to arrange for such a situation, which must happen before Ying Li, his granddaughter, takes a husband—another young male in the line of succession would interfere with his plans.

Shiau Chen: Shiau Chen owns and operates the Lily Pad with his wife, two daughters, and a son. His wife, Cornelia, was the daughter of a farmer from Arabel. She became fascinated by the Shou when she was sent to Xiousing to procure a herbal remedy for her father. Over long talks about his homeland, Shiau fell in love with Cornelia, and she with him. At the time, Shiau was a member of the Chuen, but he was cast out of the organization when he chose to take a Cormyrian wife. Now Shiau and Cornelia Chen want to create a place that is welcoming and open to all who wish to experience Shou culture.

Dei Chiang: Dei Chiang is the proprietor of the laundry. Her wrinkled, unsmiling face is a testament to the difficult life she has lived. Her husband was a Shou Purple Dragon Knight killed in the line of duty, the only casualty of a skirmish from which several non-Shou knights escaped unharmed. She was left alone to raise their six daughters, all of whom are still unmarried. She despises the non-Shou Purple Dragon Knights and blames them for her husband's death. Dei is also not pleased that Chang Li took a non-Shou wife, overlooking her oldest daughters.

Jiao Chiang, the youngest of the daughters (having seen just eleven summers), frequents the Lily Pad to offer her services as a guide around Xiousing. She introduces wealthy or powerful Shou men to her older sisters, and she informs her mother of other outsiders visiting their town. Dei likes to keep close tabs on comings and goings in Xiousing, and she is an active member of the Chuen.

Yi Woo: Since he was a boy, Yi Woo has had a strong connection to nature and primal power. Now he runs the clinic and treats the ill of Xiousing, as well as foreigners who have heard of his reputation and travel here to seek remedies for their ailments.

Unknown to the general public, Yi Woo studied martial and arcane arts from the greatest masters before coming to Xiousing. He then secretly studied under Duc-Sum Li at the Lightning Dragon. Yi Woo has applied his studies to his natural ability, creating a unique fighting style. He is often frustrated by the Purple Dragons' inability to act against supposed criminals, especially when evidence has been known to disappear before a trial could be held. Yi Woo secretly champions the good people of Xiousing, dressing in black from head to toe and dispensing his version of justice under the cover of night.

HALF-SHOU

Ever since Xiousing was founded, relations between the citizens of Marsember and the Shou who settled here have been friendly. Several Marsembians married Shou, blending the best of both cultures. As the children of these families grew to adulthood, though, they had trouble maintaining the balance between Cormyrian traditions and Shou customs. Although generally accepted by residents of Xiousing, they come into conflict with the Chuen, which sees their existence as a threat to the traditional values of the Shou. Some half-Shou work at Marsember's docks, at the far end of the city; many leave for lives in other cities where their mixed heritage is unknown.

Adventure Hooks

Not every problem can be handled internally, and often outsiders have the special resources available to deal with issues that arise.

The Zhao Stones: A group of sahuagin is trying to enact a ritual to flood the area and reclaim their ancestral home. Each week, the sahuagin stealthily place another engraved stone along the shores of the Zhao. They also have been kidnapping common folk to offer to Umberlee. When all of the stones have been placed and the sacrifices prepared, they will perform their ritual. Not only would the returning waters destroy Xiousing, much of the rest of Marsember would be submerged.

The Crooked Knight: Lin Tung is a Shou Purple Dragon Knight who has decided that the Nine Golden Swords would make a better ruler than the king of Cormyr. This corrupt knight has been intimidating witnesses and tampering with key criminal cases. Recently, a murderer was set free because the evidence against the person disappeared. As the tension between the Purple Dragon Knights and the Shou citizens heightens, a neutral third party is needed to investigate the matter of the missing evidence.

The Stolen Tome: A tome on ancient dragon lore was recently stolen from Mayoy Kuo's curio shop. He is offering a reward for the recovery of his property. What he does not know is that the tome holds clues to the burial site of Garthanian, and with the book in hand, the Cult of the Dragon is close to raising a dracolich.

The Vanished Bride: A week ago, Dei Chiang's second-oldest daughter Soon was to marry Chau Phat, the son of a wealthy Shou merchant. On the day of the wedding, Soon disappeared during her preparation. Rumors abound that she ran away with a secret lover or that she was kidnapped by a rival of Chau Phat and is being held for ransom. Some whisper that her older sister Ning was jealous that her younger sister was marrying first, and that Ning has something to do with Soon's disappearance. None suspect the real reason: Soon has a spellscar that has recently manifested and is becoming more difficult to hide. It activated due to her anxiety about the upcoming wedding, and she worries that when her husband-to-be learns of her deformity, he will reject her.

The Dying Crops: Some of the rare herbs in Chen's garden are withering and dying. Duc-Sum Li suspects that one of the Spice Lords of Marsember is trying to cut out the competition by poisoning the crops. However, Duc-Sum does not know which Spice Lord is behind the plot, and even if he did, he has no authority to move without solid proof.

About the Author

Dan Anderson started gaming over thirty years ago with the D&D® *Basic Set*. He has written several Living Forgotten Realms adventures, including CORM2-4 *Fury of the Queen of Thorns*, EPIC3-2 *Cracks in the Crimson Cage*, and CALI3-2 *The Menace of Memnon*. Dan also serves as the RPGA Coordinator for Total Confusion.

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Bestiary: Flowers in the Darkness

By Tim Eagon

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Plants manage to thrive in the Shadowfell despite the pervasive gloom. Deprived of adequate sunlight, those that need more sustenance turn to other sources. Some feed on the flesh and blood of living creatures, while others require less tangible nourishment, such as life energy. Most of these sinister plants are ambulatory and possess a hint of sentience. Since the Shadowfell offers much less food than the mortal world, shadow plants have crept into the that realm from the echo plane. They linger near shadow crossings, graveyards, necropolises, and battlefields, where they wait for their next meal to approach.

Dusanu

Natives of the Shadowdark, dusanus are fungus creatures easily mistaken for undead. A specimen looks like a yellowing, mold-encrusted humanoid skeleton wearing decaying scraps of clothing. Pale blue light issues from its hollow eye sockets, and the air surrounding it smells strongly of dry rot. However, dusanus are actually fungal colonies that inhabit humanoid skeletons and fill every crevice except the eye sockets.Lights within these sockets are actually waste gases that the fungus emits. Dusanus reproduce by infecting living humanoids with their spores, and each one's goal in life is to find a new host. Once an infected host succumbs, the newly born colony reanimates the host's skeleton, rendering the bones spongy and flexible. Then the process begins anew.

Lore

Arcana DC 16: The fungus that animates dusanus can be found in the wild in patches of sallow mold that can cause the disease known as dusanu rot. Whether in an inanimate patch or animating a skeleton, a dusanu colony possesses a clever hivemind. The hivemind cannot speak, but it is possible to converse with it using ritual magic. Few have done so, since dusanus have little to offer intellectually.

Dusanus hail from the Shadowdark and can be found anywhere molds and fungi are prevalent. Shadar-kai and other shadowborn races sometimes refer to dusanus as rot fiends.

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Encounters

Dusanus roam in small packs, and they haunt forests, swamps, ruins, and caverns. They ignore nonhumanoid creatures and nonliving creatures, since such creatures make unsuitable hosts. Oozes, vermin, actual undead, and constructs are usually willing to tolerate the musty presence of a dusanu pack. Cultists of Zuggtmoy, the Demon Queen of Fungi, sometimes seek out dusanus and expose themselves to the spores as a test of loyalty to their queen. Such cultists might maintain patches of dusanu mold to reanimate their dead.

Dusanus in Combat

Dusanus rush headlong into battle, lashing out with their sharp claws while trying to expose as many living humanoids as possible to their infectious spores.

Dusanu Rot **Level 7 Disease**

This disease starts as an itchy rash, progressing as sickening sallow mold erupts from the victim's skin.

Stage 0: The target recovers from the disease.
Stage 1: While affected by stage 1, the target loses a healing surge.
Stage 2: While affected by stage 2, the target regains only half the normal hit points from healing effects. In addition, the target gains the plant keyword until cured.
Stage 3: While affected by stage 3, the target regains only half the normal hit points from healing effects. After an extended rest, the target takes 15 poison damage that cannot be healed until the disease is cured. If the target dies, it immediately rises as a dusanu.
Check: At the end of each extended rest, the target makes an Endurance check.
10 or Lower: The stage of the disease increases by 1. If already at stage 3, the target dies and rises as a dusanu.
11–15: No change.
16 or Higher: The stage of the disease decreases by 1.

Dusanu **Level 7 Brute**
Medium shadow magical beast (plant) XP 300

HP 93; **Bloodied** 46 **Initiative** +5
AC 19, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 19 **Perception** +6
Speed 6 Darkvision

Traits

Brittle Bones
If the dusanu takes cold damage or radiant damage, it cannot use *spongy bones* until the end of its next turn.

Standard Actions

Moldy Claw ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC
Hit: 2d10 + 7 damage, and the target takes a –2 penalty to any saving throw made at the end of the encounter to avoid contracting dusanu rot. If this attack bloodies the target, the penalty increases to –5.

Rotting Spores (disease, poison) **✦ Recharge** when the dusanu takes lightning damage
Attack: Close burst 1 (enemies in the burst); +10 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 3d8 + 4 poison damage.
Miss: Half damage.
Effect: At the end of the encounter, the target must make a saving throw if it is a living humanoid. On a failure, the target contracts dusanu rot (stage 1).

Triggered Actions

Spongy Bones ✦ At-Will
Trigger: A weapon attack hits the dusanu.
Effect (Immediate Interrupt): The dusanu gains resist 5 to all damage against the triggering attack.

Skills Stealth +10

Str 19 (+7)	**Dex** 14 (+5)	**Wis** 16 (+6)
Con 13 (+4)	**Int** 4 (+0)	**Cha** 5 (+0)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

Hangman Tree

Named for the manner in which it attacks and kills its prey, the hangman tree (also commonly known as the gallows tree) resembles a treant with few branches, sparse foliage, and ropy vines ending in nooselike snares. Its shallow root system and lack of leaves make the tree unable to draw sustenance from the wan light of the Shadowfell. The hangman tree instead consumes fresh meat that it captures with its vines. A hangman tree is not a mindless hunter, however. It relishes the act of slowly choking the life from its victims.

Lore

Arcana DC 19: Two theories explain the existence of these malevolent trees. One view holds that they are dark reflections of treants. However, most sages believe that the first hangman trees arose following the lynching of a notorious assassin who favored the garrote. When his blood mixed with the soil beneath the oak where his enemies executed him, it corrupted the acorns lying there. The first hangman trees sprung from those seeds. This legend concludes with these first trees relentlessly pursuing and strangling their progenitor's horrified killers.

Encounters

Hangman trees are hateful, murderous creatures. They might ally with other evil forest dwellers that can more easily lure prey into the trees' clutches. These trees prefer warm-blooded prey, which means that undead and other nonliving creatures could safely linger nearby. Opportunistic scavengers sometimes trail a hangman tree from a distance, hoping to recover any indigestible valuables the tree expels.

Hangman Tree **Level 9 Elite Soldier**
Huge shadow magical beast (plant) XP 800

HP 200; **Bloodied** 100 **Initiative** +10
AC 25, **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 20 **Perception** +7
Speed 5 Low-light vision
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Traits

Pulling Grab
The tree can attempt to move a grabbed target as part of any action during which the tree also moves. It gains a +4 bonus to the Strength check to do so, and on a success, the tree can move up to its full speed.

Standard Actions

Noose Vine ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 3 (one creature); +12 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d8 + 3 damage, and the tree grabs the target (escape DC 17). Until the grab ends, the target takes ongoing 5 damage. The grab persists even if the tree is unable to take actions.

Lashing Vines ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The tree uses *noose vine* twice.

Swallow (acid) ✦ **Recharge** when the tree has no creature swallowed
Attack: Melee 3 (one creature the tree is grabbing); +12 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 4d8 + 12 damage, the grab ends, and the target is swallowed (escape DC 17). While swallowed, the target is removed from play, and it takes ongoing 10 acid damage. When the effect ends or the tree drops to 0 hit points, the target appears in an unoccupied square of its choice adjacent to the tree.

Minor Actions

Alluring Scent (charm) ✦ **At-Will** (1/round)
Attack: Close burst 5 (enemies in the burst); +12 vs. Will
Hit: The tree pulls the target up to 4 squares.

Deceptive Veil (illusion) ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The tree disguises itself to appear as a Huge tree or treant until it uses *deceptive veil* again or drops to 0 hit points. Other creatures can make a DC 30 Insight check to discern the form is an illusion.

Str 20 (+9)	**Dex** 18 (+8)	**Wis** 16 (+7)
Con 20 (+9)	**Int** 6 (+2)	**Cha** 9 (+3)

Alignment evil **Languages** Common

Hangman Trees in Combat

Although dimwitted, hangman trees are cunning predators. They often lurk near frequently trafficked areas such as roads and game trails, and they use illusion and scent to attract prey. The trees use their vines to strangle their victims before drawing them into an orifice near the top of their trunks, which opens into a digestive cavity filled with acidic sap. Sharp, downward-pointing growths surrounding the top opening make it extremely difficult for any creature to escape from the gullet.

Reaper Blossom

These vile plants resemble clusters of orchid-like flowers with white petals and leaves that resemble the curved blade of a scythe. A thicket of creeping vines and tangled roots connects the individual blossoms. A dim intelligence directs these malign flowers, whose toxic pollen can rapidly drain the life force from any living creature, spawning a terrible wraith in the process.

Lore

Arcana DC 16: Although they are found throughout the Shadowfell, reaper blossoms are not naturally occurring. Those knowledgeable on the subject suspect that the flowers are Orcus's creations. The blossoms' diet of souls and ability to spawn undead gives credence to this belief, which has motivated the Raven Queen's followers to declare reaper blossoms an affront to her. Her shadar-kai and sorrowsworn servants destroy any patches they encounter and attempt to end the illicit trade of the plant's seeds. Despite their best efforts, reaper blossoms continue to spread. Each day, more and more patches sprout up, even within the wintry borders of Letherna.

Encounters

Reaper blossoms flourish in areas that have a strong association with death, such as graveyards and battlefields. Undead, especially ghosts, specters, and wraiths, frequently share territory and ally with these deadly flowers. Worshipers of Orcus cultivate reaper blossoms to safeguard their blasphemous shrines.

Reaper Blossoms in Combat

Reaper blossoms are almost immobile, but they spread quickly. The blossoms hurl poisonous seedpods, which unleash torrents of necrotic energy and sprout instantly. Victims can quickly and unexpectedly find

Reaper Blossom Cluster **Level 6 Elite Artillery**
Large shadow magical beast (plant) XP 500

HP 61; **Bloodied** 30 **Initiative** +3
AC 20, **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 18 **Perception** +6
Speed 1, burrow 3 (cannot shift) Blindsight 10
Resist half damage from melee and ranged attacks;
Vulnerable 5 against close and area attacks, 5 radiant
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Traits

Swarm Attack (necrotic, poison) ✦ **Aura** 1
Any enemy that starts its turn in the aura takes 5 necrotic and poison damage.

Spawn Wraith
When the cluster kills a living humanoid, that humanoid becomes a wraith figment (*Monster Vault*, page 287) at the start of the cluster's next turn. The wraith figment appears in the space where the humanoid died or in the nearest unoccupied square, and it rolls a new initiative check. The wraith acts under the Dungeon Master's control.

Swarm
The cluster can occupy the same space as another creature, and an enemy can enter the cluster's space, which is difficult terrain. The cluster cannot be pulled, pushed, or slid by melee or ranged attacks. It can squeeze through any opening that is large enough for a Tiny creature.

Standard Actions

Wretched Seed (necrotic, poison) ✦ **At-Will**
Special: This attack doesn't provoke opportunity attacks.
Attack: Ranged 10 (one or two creatures); +11 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d6 + 7 necrotic and poison damage.
Effect: A reaper blossom offshoot appears in an unoccupied square adjacent to the target or in the nearest unoccupied square.

Enervating Pollen (necrotic, poison) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⚅
Attack: Close blast 3 (enemies in the blast); +9 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d6 + 7 necrotic and poison damage.
Effect: The cluster's *swarm attack* increases to aura 2 until the end of the cluster's next turn.

Move Action

Hidden Roots ✦ **Recharge** when the cluster is first bloodied
Effect: The cluster burrows up to 9 squares through loose earth or dirt. It provokes no opportunity attacks for leaving the square in which it started.

Triggered Actions

Bloodied Germination ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The cluster is first bloodied.
Effect (Free Action): The cluster uses *wretched seed* twice.

Str 3 (-1)	**Dex** 10 (+3)	**Wis** 16 (+6)
Con 19 (+7)	**Int** 3 (-1)	**Cha** 4 (+0)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** –

Reaper Blossom Offshoot **Level 6 Minion Brute**
Tiny shadow magical beast (plant) XP –

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. **Initiative** –
AC 18, **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 18 **Perception** +6
Speed 0 Blindsight 10
Immune forced movement

Traits

Shared Roots
If an offshoot can sense a creature, then any reaper blossom cluster within 10 squares of the offshoot can also sense that creature. A reaper blossom cluster can use the offshoot as the origin square for *enervating pollen*.

Triggered Actions

Death Creep (necrotic, poison) ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The offshoot drops to 0 hit points.
Attack (No Action): Close burst 1 (enemies in the burst); +9 vs. Fortitude.
Hit: 6 necrotic and poison damage, and one reaper blossom cluster within 5 squares of the offshoot slides 1 square.

Str 3 (-1)	**Dex** 10 (+3)	**Wis** 16 (+6)
Con 17 (+6)	**Int** 3 (-1)	**Cha** 4 (+0)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** –

themselves surrounded by newly sprouted flowers. Reaper blossoms can also expel puffs of life-draining pollen, making a sound similar to the wheezing of a dying human. A reaper blossom's shallow roots can draw the plant beneath the soil, allowing it to reposition itself away from a serious threat.

Vampire Rose

Vampire roses are creeping bushes with exceptionally beautiful white blooms. Belying this alluring appeal, they are actually carnivorous plants that drain the blood of living creatures. A vampire rose is an insatiable predator driven into frenzy by the scent of blood. As it drinks, its white blossoms turn a dusky shade of pink and then finally a dark crimson.

Lore

Arcana DC 16: Vampire roses grow in the wild, especially near vampire crypts. Various groups cultivate these dangerous plants. The undead aesthetes of the Pale Court regard vampire roses as one of the purest expressions of beauty and death, and they go to great lengths to obtain the most beautiful specimens. Vrylokas also have an affinity for the plants, viewing them as symbols of the Red Witch. The rose motif of vryloka armor, clothing, and artwork reflects this connection.

Encounters

With the exception of vampires and vrylokas, most creatures give these deadly roses a wide berth. Vampire roses encountered outside the Shadowfell commonly serve alongside other monstrous plants as guardians, especially in the gardens of hags, necromancers, and the undead. Rumor has it that a cruel archfey known as the Bramble Queen delights in tossing wounded captives to her favorite "pet," a massive vampire rose vine that towers over the trees in her demesne.

Vampire Rose	**Level 4 Controller**
Medium shadow beast (plant)	XP 175
HP 58; **Bloodied** 29	**Initiative** +4
AC 18, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 16	**Perception** +7
Speed 4 (forest walk)	Blindsight 10
Vulnerable 5 radiant	
Traits	
Bloodthirsty	
The rose can make opportunity attacks against bloodied creatures within 2 squares of it.	
Light Sensitivity	
If the rose takes radiant damage, its grabs end.	
Plant Form	
The rose is indistinguishable from a normal rose bush. A creature can make a DC 21 Arcana check or Nature check to discern that the rose is a monster.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Thorny Tendril** ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +9 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d4 + 6 damage, and the rose grabs the target (escape DC 14).	
Effect: The rose can pull the target 1 square.	
ǂ **Subjugating Injection** (poison) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature the rose is grabbing); +7 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 1d6 + 3 poison damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).	
First Failed Saving Throw: The target is also weakened (save ends both).	
Second Failed Saving Throw: The target is also weakened and dominated (save ends all).	
ǂ **Blood Drain** (healing) ✦ **Recharge** when the rose bloodies a creature or grabs a bloodied creature	
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature the rose is grabbing); +7 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 2d8 + 6 damage, and the rose regains 10 hit points.	
Skills Stealth +9	
Str 15 (+4) **Dex** 14 (+4) **Wis** 10 (+2)	
Con 18 (+6) **Int** 2 (-2) **Cha** 16 (+5)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	

Vampire Roses in Combat

When a vampire rose wishes to feed, it whips a thorn-studded tendril at its prey. The tendril wraps around the prey and the thorns pierce the skin. The thorns are hollow and inject an anesthetic poison into the prey, making it difficult for it to fight off the vampire rose or escape its grasp. Once it has secured its prey, the vampire rose quickly drains all blood through the same thorns.

About the Author

Tim Eagon is a freelance writer living in Madison, Wisconsin. He has written several articles for *Dragon*® and *Dungeon*®, including "The Oasis of the Golden Peacock," "Winning Races: Eladrin—Beyond the Spiral Tower," and "Power Play: Arcane Familiars of Athas."

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DARK SUN CAMPAIGN SETTING

Eye on Dark Sun

Terrors of the Silt Sea

By Rodney Thompson

Illustration by Christopher Burdett

As if the Sea of Silt were not dangerous enough, filled with fine powder that suffocates human-sized creatures, many frightening beasts call it home. Veteran sailors of the Sea of Silt tell tales of nightmarish monsters, such as the notorious silt horror. Such stories inspire terror in those both who ply the Silt Sea on skimmers and those who live on its shore. Among the horrific creatures that inhabit the silt, two of the most frightening are the azraloka and the oasis beast.

Azraloka

Colloquially known as "decksweepers" to the crews of silt skimmers, azralokas burrow through the silt and leap at prey that drifts close to the surface. Long and slender, with large jagged dorsal fins and multiple rows of sharp teeth, azralokas resemble mutated versions of the ancient sharks whose fossils have been found in Athas's long-dry ocean beds. An azraloka is longer than a human's height and weighs around 400 pounds, with a heavily muscled body.

Lore

Nature DC 18: Azralokas are dangerous predators that "swim" through the Sea of Silt. Their muscular bodies allow them to generate amazing speed, enough to propel them into the air and grab prey in their wide mouths. An azraloka's jaw clamps down so strongly that the prey cannot pull free before the beast's great bulk drags it down into the silt. Crews aboard silt skimmers keep careful watch for a cluster of azralokas, since the predators can easily snatch sailors from the deck of a ship and plunge them to a horrific death below.

Azralokas are voracious carnivores with an incredible ability to sense the vibrations of passing silt skimmers. Some people believe that the beasts can tell which ships have crew on deck by differences in the skimmers' vibrations as they move. Azralokas traveling close to the surface can even detect airborne creatures and have been known to bring down aarakocras and other large flying beasts that come too close.

Encounters

Azralokas travel in schools of four to ten members and have no fear of the larger creatures that inhabit the Sea of Silt. Some of the bolder schools trawl around the nests of silt horrors, feeding on any scraps left behind by those creatures or, in rare cases, snatching prey from a horror's tentacles.

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Azraloka	Level 10 Skirmisher
Medium natural beast	XP 500
HP 107; **Bloodied** 53	**Initiative** +9
AC 24, **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 21	**Perception** +13
Speed 3, burrow 8, fly 8 (altitude limit 0)	Tremorsense 20
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Bite** ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +15 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d10 + 7 damage.	
⸸ **Sailing Grab** ✦ **At-Will**	
Requirement: The azraloka must not be grabbing a creature.	
Effect: The azraloka flies up to 8 squares (flying no higher than 3 squares off the ground) and can make the following attack at any point during this movement, after which it must land.	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +15 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d10 + 7 damage, and the azraloka grabs the target (escape DC 18). The azraloka pulls the grabbed creature with it while it moves. This movement does not provoke opportunity attacks from the grabbed target.	
Str 21 (+10) **Dex** 14 (+7) **Wis** 16 (+8)	
Con 19 (+9) **Int** 2 (+1) **Cha** 7 (+3)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	

Some of the giants that live on islands in the Sea of Silt encourage azralokas to nest nearby, thus affording their refuges greater protection. Though they are too large for any azraloka to take down, wading giants typically carry heavy wooden shields to bat away the hungry beasts and discourage swarming. Some giants train their azraloka schools (a grisly process that involves offering up lots of meat to the creatures) and can direct the beasts to attack encroaching vessels while the giants hurl rocks or spears from shore.

Azralokas in Combat

An azraloka strikes quickly, then drag its prey beneath the silt. If a creature is too tough to bring down in one swipe, the azraloka rams it repeatedly until the target is too weak to resist being pulled under.

Oasis Beast

Devious creatures that emerge only at night, oasis beasts lure travelers seeking the Silt Sea's rare islands to their ruin. Eyewitness accounts of oasis beasts are rare, since the creatures don't reveal themselves to more than a few potential victims at once, and rare are the survivors of their attacks.

An oasis beast has a long, lizardlike body with a sinuous tail and a scaly dorsal ridge. Its huge mouth is filled with large teeth the size of shortspears, and a bulb-tipped plume dangles down over the crown of its head. An oasis beast swims through the silt as easily as an azraloka does, despite its size, and travels close to the surface.

Lore

Nature DC 20: Oasis beasts hunt on a simple principle: Creatures traveling on the surface of the Silt Sea need to find islands for shelter and sustenance. Once the blazing red sun has set and darkness falls, an oasis beast pushes upward, creating a small rise in the silt. The plume on the beast's head serves as more than decoration; it protrudes from the sand, and at night the bulb at the plume's end generates a flickering luminescence. From a distance, the monster's shape resembles a small island with a campfire burning on its shores.

Travelers who get within attack range realize their mistake too late. The oasis beast lunges upward with enough force to overturn smaller silt skimmers, then devours any creatures that spill from the decks. This strategy of lying in wait means that the oasis beast cannot easily chase after prey but must rely on the foolishness of inexperienced travelers. However, it needs to feed only every few days, and it can go up to a month without eating if it has gorged itself.

Arcana DC 20: Like many Athasian creatures, the oasis beast has a small amount of psionic talent. Creatures that get too close to it might be lured in by the hypnotic flickering of the beast's plume, even when aware of its presence.

Encounters

Oasis beasts are solitary creatures, at least within their own species. Rarely, several work in concert, but they are hampered by gluttony and covetousness. Smaller creatures of the Silt Sea occasionally swarm near an oasis beast, feeding off leftovers from its meals. Most of these creatures are small and little threat on their own.

Oasis beasts sometimes exploit other hazards to drive prey to them. A favored tactic is to wait until a storm sweeps across the Sea of Silt, then emerge and illuminate their lures to attract sailors in search of a refuge.

Oasis Beasts in Combat

Once it reveals itself, an oasis beast attacks with short bursts of intense violence, seeking to overwhelm its prey. If this approach fails, the creature might try another tack, such as a surprise attack from below or from a blind side.

Oasis Beast	**Level 13 Elite Lurker**
Large natural beast	XP 1,600
HP 206; **Bloodied** 103	**Initiative** +13
AC 27, **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 24, **Will** 25	**Perception** +15
Speed 2, burrow 8	Tremorsense 20
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1	

Traits

Combat Advantage
The beast deals 4d10 extra damage against any creature granting combat advantage to it.

False Oasis
The beast can make a Stealth check to become hidden while on the surface of silt and not engaged in combat, even if it does not have any cover or concealment.

Standard Actions

Bite ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +18 vs. AC
Hit: 3d10 + 5 damage.

Flickering Lure (charm) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Close burst 5 (enemies in the burst); +16 vs. Will
Hit: The beast pulls the target a number of squares up to the target's speed. Until the end of the beast's next turn, each target grants combat advantage to it.

Rising Burst ✦ **Recharge** when the beast uses *deep plunge*
Requirement: The beast must be burrowing.
Effect: The beast burrows up to its burrow speed to a square aboveground. This movement does not provoke opportunity attacks. When it first enters a square aboveground during this movement, it makes the following attack.
Attack: Close burst 2 (creatures in the burst); +16 vs. Reflex
Hit: 4d10 + 8 damage, and the beast pushes the target up to 4 squares.
Miss: Half damage, and the beast pushes the target up to 2 squares.

Move Actions

Deep Plunge ✦ **Recharge** when the beast uses *rising burst*
Effect: The beast burrows up to its burrow speed. This movement does not provoke opportunity attacks. If the beast ends its turn completely submerged in silt, it gains resist 15 to all damage until the start of its next turn.

Skills Stealth +14

Str 23 (+12)	**Dex** 17 (+9)	**Wis** 19 (+10)
Con 19 (+10)	**Int** 2 (+2)	**Cha** 10 (+6)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

About the Author

Rodney Thompson is an RPG designer at Wizards of the Coast, originally from Chattanooga, Tennessee. His credits for the Dungeons & Dragons® game include *Monster Manual*® 3, the *Dark Sun*® *Campaign Setting*, *Heroes of the Fallen Lands*™, *Heroes of the Forgotten Kingdoms*™, and *Monster Vault*™.

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Counter Arguments

By Stephen Radney-MacFarland

Illustration by Craig J Spearing

The other day a friend pinged me with a private message. Her group had just finished a marathon session of D&D; seven or eight hours, I believe she said. However, as she described the game's action, it seemed to me they had accomplished little in that amount of time.

When I DM, I tend to run the game fast; my years of working under strict time constraints at conventions have trained me into this behavior. I have a lot of tools and shortcuts at my disposal, and I don't expect most DMs to run the game as fast as me, but this group was relatively low level, and they had only played through a skill challenge, a pair of roleplaying encounters, and three combat encounters.

My curiosity piqued, I got a little nosy. I began questioning her about the nature and particulars of the encounters. They all seemed fairly simple. There weren't any set-piece brawls with a solo and a host of standards, or a horde of elites, or any of the other nasty tricks I'll tend to throw at my players every now and then. The skill challenge seemed to be a complexity 2 or 3 at most, and the roleplaying was of the simple question-and-answer variety. Maybe they went out to dinner? Or there was some other long break? No and no. Was there a lot of table chitchat about TV shows, comic books, or the latest movie? I know any of those can eat up a lot of time around the game table. Nope . . . well, not about those subjects, anyway. I asked what the chitchat was about.

"Stephen, can I ask you a question?" Uh-oh. I knew this was serious.

"Sure," I typed back.

"Why are there so many arguments in D&D?"

She went on to spit and spew about the long and aggravating arguments her group had throughout the session and questioned whether or not she wanted to play with this group anymore. This was serious, and at the time I didn't have an answer for her. Now I think I do, along with ways that we DMs can work to reduce the number of disruptive arguments at the game table.

The Answer(s)

I'll have to admit that at first, my friend's question caught me off guard. I thought long sessions of arguments were a thing of D&D's past, and a thing of earlier (one might say less precise) editions. As she started to describe the amount of arguing going on, it became obvious that nearly half of the session was swallowed up by a group of players arguing with each other and the DM. My friend described this subset of rabble-rousers as "the boys," but this seemed more a statement of her perception of their maturity than a condemnation of their gender.

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What did they argue about? How different powers interacted with one another (dude, we can totally pass around that *belt of vigor* during a short rest); the wording of triggers and timing of triggers in free, immediate, and opportunity actions (no, it interrupts the attack, and stops the attack, so the attack never happened, so you can't use that power); and plausibility or silliness of different effects given environmental or tactical situations (really, did you just garrote a ghost?). Sometimes the argument would hinge on what the DM had said about the story, but those were not nearly as common as the rules debates.

As my friend typed frantically, venting her frustration, I was thankful that none of my various gaming groups suffered from this particular problem. However, the more I thought on the subject, the more I realized that wasn't true. Everything this particular group had argued about had come up in one of my games. The difference is that things didn't get nearly as heated as they did in my friend's game.

Were we more mature? I don't think so. The age of players at my friend's table was comparable to my groups, and I wouldn't call any of my groups "mature." Hell, I pride myself on being an overgrown 13-year-old, so maturity is not really my strong suit either. We all still snicker at fart jokes and give each other a ration of crap whenever the opportunity presents itself.

Did the folks in my group have more game experience? Maybe, but even that's debatable. It sounds like my friend's group is filled with people that played various editions of the game. While no one in the group designs games for a living, playing D&D with those folks is rarely a recipe for smooth sailing; quite the opposite, actually. The more I thought about it, the more I think the difference was that over the years I had spontaneously stumbled upon the root causes of the arguments and found ways to combat them. At least that's my story for the sake of this column, and I'm sticking to it.

There are many reasons why arguments can pop up in your game, and some of them have nothing to do with the game. The first reason is a lack of rules understanding, the second is the clinging desire to have the best possible outcome, and the third is the desire of the arguer to create a better game reality. In order to cut down rule arguments around the table, you must understand the underlying reasons for the arguments. To achieve that understanding, we'll look at each reason individually.

That's Not What the Rules Say!

How many times have you heard that line around the table? A DM has to wear many hats—storyteller, moderator, amateur thespian, social planner—but no other DM role is more contentious than that of arbitrator of the rules. Once upon a time, D&D was a game where the DM held all the arcane knowledge. He or she owned the rare books and had the set of rare dice that made the entire game go around. Because of this situation, the DM owned the rules. Nowadays the rules are more transparent and are often treated as something more akin to covenants. They tend to be more consistent and clearer, and hidden knowledge tends to be the exception rather than the rule. I believe this trend not only makes things more enjoyable for players, it also frees up a lot of time for the DM. On the flip side, it means that the DM has less flexibility to fiddle with the rules on the sly. In other words, although it is a DM's job to make stuff up, the rules are often treated as nearly sacrosanct. Does that mean you make up a new race, class, power, or magic item? Of course not. In the end, the game is a toolbox for story creation, but a collective one. When you make such changes, you should put them in writing, and give them to your players for reference. Players and DMs alike should have a reasonable expectation of how the rules work in almost every instance, and those rules should be as written. When that's not the case, these kinds of arguments pop up.

Now, the rules for a roleplaying game are complicated creatures, and even the clearest rules can be open to interpretation especially by those eager to gain benefit from a perceived interpretation (see below). That's why it is important for every DM to stay reasonably up to date with the rules. That doesn't mean memorizing every rule component of the game—especially material like player powers and magic items—but it does mean regularly brushing up on the general components of the rules. Know how secondary attacks work, the intricacies of the ready and delay actions, and how to calculate a success for an Athletics check to jump. If you have a hard time doing that, referencing is your friend. Place tags in your books for especially tricky or hard-to-remember rules bits, or write them down on sticky notes and place them on your DM screen; do whatever you need to do to have them on hand. And don't be afraid to slow down the game a smidgen every now and then to look up a rule you are not familiar with or that your brain has inadvertently dropped. Too much winging it can often frustrate players who work out strategies and plans of attack based on how the rules work. Deviating too far and in the wrong instances will often result in your players calling foul. And when they do that, you can expect an argument.

There is another reason why a DM should know the rules pretty well (or have them referenced and close at hand), and that is that players often conveniently forget or misinterpret the rules for their own benefit (usually inadvertently). If you can point this out early and often, you'll be able to sidestep rules arguments later. Many times if you allow a misinterpretation of the rules to stand once or twice, the player will then just assume that's how the rule should work, and will become aggravated at the correction later, spurring more arguments.

That's How I Thought it Worked!

My wife, by her own admission, has a tendency not to read what a rule says, but what she wants it to say. This tendency often comes up when we play *Magic: The Gathering*. There are some games where I have to correct the application of card effects on her turn because her mind decided to ignore some subtlety of the rules—usually one that puts a limitation on her actions in using a card.

My wife is no anomaly. I think we all have done this to a greater or lesser degree. We do this because we, as a species, look at things the way we want to see them and not as they actually are. We are hardwired to avoid the bad and maximize the good, to look for any way we can to get out of trouble. It's a pretty powerful survival instinct. Worse still, even when confronted with fact, we often fight on, not wanting to give up our take on the situation, and then we start to argue just for the sake of arguing. I know I have a tendency to do that, and everything I've seen from other gamers leads me to believe I'm typical in this regard.

It also doesn't help that the exceptions of most game rules tend to be written as permissions, and we tend to dwell on the exceptions. Most prohibitions in modern rule sets are handled (some might say hidden) in the general rules of the game. Let me give you an example. Let's look at the 2nd-level wizard utility power, *shield*.

Shield Wizard Utility 2

You throw up your hand, and a shield of arcane energy springs into existence, protecting you against imminent attacks.

Encounter ✦ Arcane
Immediate Interrupt **Personal**
Trigger: You are hit by an attack.
Effect: You gain a +4 power bonus to AC and Reflex until the end of your next turn.

I cannot tell you how many times I've seen this power played during a caster's own turn, and a casual look at the power wouldn't make you think that doing this is wrong. The power has statements telling you what you can do and when you can do it, but no statements telling you when you can't use it. That information is sitting in keywords, which means that the rule that tells you you can't play an immediate action when it is not your turn lives somewhere else, not in the standard user interface of the spell itself. There are some good reasons for this, but it is often the source of rules arguments.

After getting tripped up by these prohibitions early on, I wrote a little cheat sheet, a short list of the prohibitions and permissions in the general rules of the game. I put the ban on taking immediate actions on your turn on that list. The maximum once a round (and then once a turn) on sneak attack ended up on that list, as did the fact that PCs could spend one action point an encounter, while monsters could spend multiple action points during an encounter, but only one action point a round. Having a list like this, along with a rules reference, not only help you run the game, it also brings quick ends to arguments by players who are playing the game the way they want it to work and not how it actually works.

Of course, getting a player not to fight on after you confront him or her with the facts is not often easy. Here is a simple tactic that will help you out immensely: Just be nice. We all like to be know-it-alls, and it seems that there is a good-natured pastime among gamers that involves calling one another dumb asses (at least if the Internet is to be believed), but being polite and friendly when you point out the rules creates less argument in the long run. People don't like to feel stupid, they don't like to be wrong, and they tend to fight hard against such feeling, especially when you are lording it over them. I know it feels awesome to be a smug jerk, but trust me, you can pay the price for it in decreased game time.

That's Stupid!

In my line of work, I tend to play many games with game professionals or aspiring game professionals. You would think that having such folks in your game would increase enjoyment and ease of play, but you would be wrong. Since game design and development is an endeavor of trial-and-error and constant striving for new and better ways of doing things, these folks can be some of the most contentious and argumentative people around, especially when it comes to rules. Of course, that just doesn't go for game professionals. Roleplaying games in general, and D&D in particular, attract people with a competitive streak, a passion for (in the end) silly things, and a strong sense of entitlement. In other words, people who take their gaming seriously are constantly on the lookout to improve it in some way, which inevitably leads to the "That's stupid!" arguments.

From frost zones that are unaffected by magma, to teleportation that does not allow you to stand up from prone, to (my favorite) the blinded condition that does not stop you from making opportunity attacks (so my *rain of steel* should still be doing damage), there will always be conceits in the rules that folks think are stupid. Of course, like any argument that stops the game, those of this type have varying degrees of validity, but these kinds of arguments tend to be deeper traps. Many times there are no right or wrong answers, as they tend to attack the assumption of the game, or at the very least the subtle minutiae of the game rules in such a way that a handy list of page references isn't going to be enough to end it. Worse still, often these arguments are contingent on a person's particular view of what is possible or not in a world of fantasy—that is, his or her own suspension of disbelief, which is a very subjective thing. As the Romans said, "In matters of taste there is no dispute."

So how do you stop these arguments from spinning out of control? Take a firm but even hand. You're the DM. It is okay, nay necessary, for you to fall back

on some axioms. Though you should avoid using it too much, sometimes "Because" is a perfectly fine answer to those annoying little WTF questions. The game has to go on, after all, and quibbling is not the fuel that drives D&D's engine—imagination is.

Being firm not working? I find that simply saying, "Hey, if you don't like it, you can be the DM," often shuts up many an unruly player, no matter how stupid he or she may think a rule or a ruling is. Fact is, it's easy to criticize, it is much harder to create. And the broadness of the justification for a criticism is usually proportional to the laziness of the arguer. While this tactic is a rhetorical device, it is an effective one, because if the player takes you up on it, he or she can walk a mile or so in your shoes, and that experience has surprisingly positive effects.

Of course, sometimes you will think your players have a point, and you will consider what they have to say. When this happens, instead of taking up valuable time during the session, take it off-line or rather online via email or a message board thread. This way you can have those interested in the debate chime in without depriving other folks of valuable play time. You also don't want to be too hasty in changing a rule, especially in the case of general rules rather than specific rules. Making a rule that affects all immediate actions is more dangerous and game-affecting than changing the *shield* spell so that it can be cast as a free action with the same trigger.

In the end, the best way to shut down or at least limit the impact of rules arguments at your table is to be knowledgeable about the rules, share your knowledge in an open and generous manner, and be both firm and deliberate when changing the rules of the game. Those simple bits of advice should provide a smoother running table and more time to actually play.

About the Author

Stephen Radney-MacFarland is a game designer living large in the Seattle area. He was a developer for 4th Edition Dungeons & Dragons, a content developer for 3rd Edition organized play, and he has taught game design for the past three years. Stephen currently works at Paizo Publishing as a designer for the *Pathfinder* Roleplaying Game, writes "Save My Game," and works on the occasional D&D product. He also runs more games than his wife would prefer.

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